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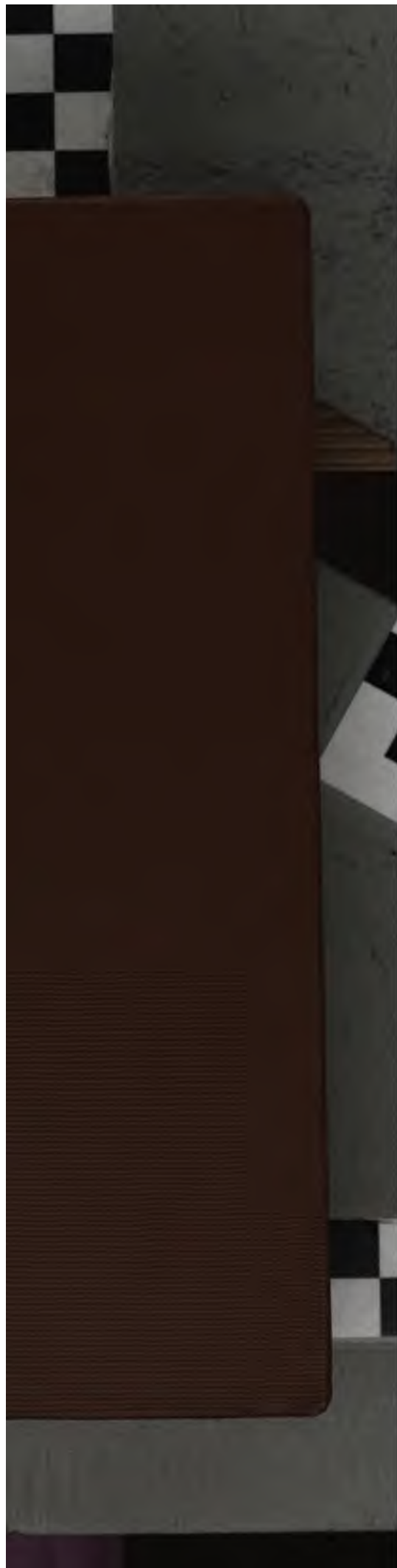
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DISCOURSES

ON THE EVIDENCE OF

REVEALED RELIGION.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S. &c.

That thou mightest know the certainty of these things wherein
thou hast been instructed. ACTS i. 4.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, NO. 72, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1794.

C. H. H.

V. 1





DEDICATION.

TO

The Rev. THOMAS BELSHAM,

TUTOR IN DIVINITY IN THE NEW COLLEGE,
HACKNEY,

DEAR SIR,

AFFECTION and esteem join with a sense of propriety in leading me to dedicate this work to you. To your friendship and society I owe a very great part of the satisfaction I have enjoyed during my residence at Clapton; not many days having ever intervened without our having had some intercourse, since I have been settled in your neighbourhood; and the interruption of it, as the breaking of any other habit, will for a long time be sensibly and painfully felt by me. It has also been an intercourse as improving as it has been pleasing to me. And without the seasonable aid of impressions from the knowledge and virtue of others, no man can tell how much his own mind might have suffered; man being the great instrument in the hand of Providence of forming men for the best or the worst purposes.

A 2

But

But what, I hope, attaches me to you more than any thing of this nature, ~~are~~ the important services you are daily rendering to the great cause which we have both at heart, *viz.* the training up of youth in the principles of liberal and useful knowledge, and especially of rational Christianity and virtue. The immediate object of these *Discourses* is one to which you have long given the greatest attention. No person educated under you can be ignorant either of what Christianity really is, or of the rational evidence on which its truth is founded; and the effect of your judicious labours is very conspicuous.

I have no where known, or heard of, such studious and orderly young men as those of the New College at Hackney, and to this your immediate inspection, as the resident tutor, and your judicious treatment, have eminently contributed. Nor have the rational Dissenters ever had ministers who, by their ability and zeal, promise to distinguish themselves more by their labours for the good of mankind than those who have been trained by you. To them, as I am going off the stage, I shall principally look for that rechristianizing of the world which is now become absolutely necessary, if Christianity is to subsist at all.

The wretched forms under which Christianity has long been generally exhibited, and its degrading

DEDICATION.

grading alliance with, or rather its subjection, to a power wholly heterogeneous to it, and which has employed it for the most unworthy purposes, has made it appear contemptible and odious in the eyes of all sensible men, who are now every where casting off the very profession, and every badge, of it. Enlightened Christians must themselves, in some measure, join with unbelievers, in exposing whatever will not bear examination in or about religion. But when it shall, by this means, be divested of all its foreign incumbrances, it will be found to be something on which neither their arguments, nor their ridicule, will have any effect. It is a farther satisfaction to me to reflect, that you and I not only agree in entertaining the same views of this subject, but that from a similar unfavourable outset, we have both gradually, and by similar means, been led to entertain them.

I think myself peculiarly happy in leaving my congregation, and especially my classes of young persons, under your care, as I know no person whose views in these respects coincide so exactly with my own. As far as they have been satisfied with me, I am confident they will be with you; and candour and goodwill in the hearers is a sure earnest of their improvement under any teacher. Happy shall I think myself if, in any future destination, I can find, or form, a sphere of exertion

of a similar kind; that I may be in America, what I shall leave you here; that we may communicate our respective plans for the improvement of ourselves, and the instruction of others, in whatever is most interesting to man; and that, by the discipline and experience that we acquire here, we may be prepared for a sphere of superior usefulness, and what will surely accompany it, superior happiness, in a better state.

With the greatest affection and esteem, I am,

Dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

CUMTOWN, March 1794.

P R E F A C E.

THE subject of these discourses is one on which I have addressed the public several times before, as in my *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*. Several parts of my *History of the Christian Church*, my *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, those to *the Philosophers and Politicians of France*, and those to *the Jews*; besides the first part of the *Conclusion* of my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, addressed to Mr. Gibbon, my *Discourse on the Resurrection of Jesus*, and the large *Preface* to my *Philosophical Works* in three volumes. But the subject being of the greatest importance, and especially at this time, I have thought it not superfluous to compose, and publish, these *Discourses*, intended more particularly to illustrate the evidence arising from the *miracles* that have been wrought in favour of the divine mission of Moses and of Christ; so that, though my object be ultimately the same, the ground that I have taken is considerably different from any that I have been upon before.

The late revolution in France, attended with the complete overthrow of the civil establishment of Christianity, and the avowed rejection of all revealed religion, by many persons of the first character in that country; and by great numbers also in this, calls the attention of persons of reflection in a very forcible manner to the subject. It now more than ever behoves all the friends of religion to shew that they are not chargeable with a blind *implicit faith*, believing what their fathers, mothers, or nurses, believed before them, merely because they believed it; but that their faith is the offspring of reason: that Christianity is no *cunningly devised fable*, but that the evidence of the facts on which it is built is the same with that of any other facts of antient date; so that we must abandon all faith in history, and all human testimony, before we can disbelieve them.

The great problem to be solved is, how to account for present appearances, and such facts in antient history as no person ever did, or can deny, viz. the actual existence of Christianity, and the state of it in the age immediately following that of Christ and the apostles. Unbelievers must think that they can account for the facts without admitting the truth of the gospel history. On the other hand, the Christian says that, if this history be not admitted, the well known state of things in

the age immediately succeeding must imply more miracles, and those without any rational object, than that history supposes. The like, he says, must be the case with respect to the history of the Jews in the Old Testament. If the Mosaic history be admitted, that of the Jews in that age, and from that time to the present, is natural; but on any other supposition most unaccountable; that whole nation thinking and acting as no human beings ever did, or possibly could, think and act. Whereas, it must be taken for granted, that the Jews are, and ever have been, *men*, as well as ourselves. This is the state of the argument between believers and unbelievers in revelation, that I have frequently held out, and no person can say that it is an unfair one. Least of all it is such as as a man who wishes to be governed by *reason*, and who would account for all appearances in the most natural manner, can object to.

The present times are, no doubt, exceedingly critical with respect to Christianity; and being fully persuaded of its truth, I rejoice that they are so. Whatever will not bear the test of the most rigorous scrutiny must now be rejected; the great supports of superstition and imposture, viz. human authority, power and emolument, being now, in a great measure, withdrawn. This will be the means of purging our religion from every thing that will
not

not bear this rigorous examination; but it will contribute to the firmer establishment of every thing that *will* bear it. And what can we wish for more? It ought not to be any man's interest to maintain an error, and to take an idle tale for undoubted fact. But if revealed revelation be true, if Moses was commissioned to teach the unity of God, and the purity of his worship; and if Jesus Christ was commissioned to confirm the same, and to announce to mankind the still more interesting doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and a future state of righteous retribution, it is of infinite consequence that all men should be apprized of it; since their conduct here, and their expectations hereafter, are nearly concerned in it. Compared with truths so momentous as these, all other knowledge is a trifle.

It is no small satisfaction to Christians, that even the present prevalence of infidelity, as well as the universal spread, and final establishment, of Christianity, were foretold by Christ. And as he spake of this infidelity as one of the signs of his approaching coming, we may be looking forward with confidence and joy to that glorious event; after which the belief of Christianity, together with the reign of virtue, and of peace, will be universal. This will be that *kingdom of God, or of heaven*, which is the consummation to which we should be devoutly looking,

looking, and which, by our Saviour's direction, is the subject of our daily prayers, when *nation shall no more lift up sword against nation, and when they shall learn war no more.* For an account of other signs of the approach of this great catastrophe, I refer to my *Fast Sermon* of this year. The present times are uncommonly eventful. I expect that they will be exceedingly calamitous; but that the final issue will be most glorious.

As my *Discourse on the Resurrection of Jesus*, and also that which exhibits *a view of revealed religion*, preached at the ordination of Mr. Field, when Mr. Belsham gave the charge, printed along with it, fall within the plan of these Discourses (the latter making a proper conclusion to them) I have made them part of this course; and as I shall no more publish them separately, and wish to preserve the *Prefaces*, and the *Addresses to the Jews* prefixed to the former, I shall give them in an Appendix.

Also, at the request of some friends, for whose advice I have the greatest deference, I subjoin a copy of my *Correspondence with Mr. Gibbon*, occasioned by my presenting him with a copy of my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. It will appear that I always thought myself at liberty to do this. But he being now dead, and there
being

being no person who can be offended at it, every shadow of objection to the publication is removed.

I considered Mr. Gibbon as better qualified to discuss the evidences of Christianity than any other unbeliever in this country, and probably in any other; and his plan of attack being on the ground of *history*, and *human nature*, was the fairest of any; so that the discussion to which it would have led seemed well calculated to overturn the scheme if it was not well founded, or to establish it if it was. I therefore regret that he did not comply with my invitation, to which his writings gave the fairest occasion. The interest of important truth would, no doubt, have been promoted by it. As to Mr. Gibbon's motives for declining the discussion (which on my part would have been very dispassionate) and the temper with which the letters are written, every person will form his own judgment.

In the Preface to my *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, in which I replied to Mr. Hume's *Posthumous Dialogues*, I gave Dr. Adam Smith, with whom I had some acquaintance, a hint that I had no objection to discuss with him the Atheistical principles of his deceased friend. But he took no notice of it. No friend of religion, I trust, will ever decline the defence of his principles,

ciples, but, as the apostle Peter exhorts, be *always ready to give a reason for the hope that is in him*. And in the present state of things, it is of particular importance that young persons be carefully instructed in the grounds and principles of their religion, that they may be qualified both to give a good account of them for themselves, and be able to instruct others.



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DISCOURSES
ON THE
EVIDENCE OF DIVINE REVELATION.

DISCOURSE I.
The Importance of Religion to enlarge
the Mind of Man.

Every man who hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

i JOHN, iii. 3.

It is acknowledged that man is superior to brute creatures, and that this superiority consists in his capacity of being much happier in himself, and in his power of contributing in a more eminent degree to the happiness of others; by which means he makes nearer approaches to his Maker, who is supremely benevolent, and superlatively happy.

It is also well known, that this superiority in man, with respect to his power of
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and thereby he loses the great privilege of his rational nature. His mind, for want of an accession of new ideas, or farther knowledge, may even contract, and he may sink into a state approaching that of a brute animal, and one that is old and intractable.

This, however, I observe by the way, though I shall have some farther use for the observation hereafter; my object being to shew, that for the very same reason that a man excels other animals, a believer in divine revelation, and especially a Christian, is superior to other men; his comprehension of mind being enlarged by such knowledge as revelation brings him acquainted with, so that he is capable of being much more happy in himself, and of a more generous ardour in promoting the happiness of others. Also, being less sensible to present impressions, he will be more drawn out of himself, and be more free from that anxiety and distress to which persons who attend to themselves only are necessarily subject.

It may not be improper to consider as the first great article of revealed religion, because
cause

cause it is by this means more strongly impressed upon the mind, though it is also the dictate of nature, to be the doctrine of the being of a God: It so much stands or falls with the belief of revelation, that at present they generally go together, and they who are unbelievers in revealed religion, though they may retain the belief of a God, have little motive to *attend* to the subject, so that they are generally practical, though not absolutely speculative atheists.

Now the belief, the habitual and practical belief, of the being of God, a Being infinitely wise, powerful, and good, the author of universal nature, and the doctrine of a Providence, which is connected with it, contributes greatly to the enlargement of the mind of man, extending our views beyond what we immediately see and hear around us. Without this man is comparatively a Being of narrow views, but little advanced beyond the brutes, and has but little motive to attend to any thing beyond himself, and the lowest gratifications. Without this faith he must be liable to be

disturbed and unhinged by every cross event.

But the belief of a God, and of a Providence, of a Being who created all things, who has assigned to every creature his proper station, and who superintends the whole chain of events, relieves and enlarges the mind, and also gives us a lively interest in the concerns of others. The idea of a God is that of the father of all his creatures, and especially of all mankind; and this suggests the farther idea, that all men are brethren, the children of one common parent; and with this idea are intimately connected a thousand other pleasing ideas, and especially a sense of a common interest, and an obligation to promote it by every means in our power. With this favourable impression, we are prepared to respect, and to love, all mankind, as brethren, and to bear with one another as such. Whereas, without this idea, we feel as so many unconnected individuals, turned adrift upon the wide world, where we must each of us scramble for ourselves as well as we can,

can, and shall seldom think of attending to others, any farther than a regard to our own interest may make it expedient.

Thus, by means of faith in the being and providence of God, we are nobly carried out of, and beyond, ourselves, and are led to conceive a generous regard for others; and by this we lose nothing but a mean selfishness, and with it a tormenting anxiety, which is at the same time the characteristic, and the punishment, of a narrow, contracted mind.

There is no true, well-founded patriotism that has any other foundation than this. Without this there will always be room for suspicion and distrust, a suspicion of private and selfish views, suited to a mind destitute of this great and enlarged principle, of all mankind constituting one family, under one great head; the idea of an universal parent, who regards us all as his children, and who requires that we regard each other in the same pleasing light.

Without faith in God, and a belief of his universal benevolent providence, men must be liable to be peculiarly distressed and dis-

concerted at such calamitous events as we are daily subject to. They are evils in themselves, and we do not know to what farther evils they may lead. Even the good that we see is uncertain, and unstable, and for any thing that we know, may terminate in evil, which it will thereby only serve to aggravate. In this state of mind all is darkness and confusion, anxiety and dread.

But the moment that we begin to consider the world not as a fatherless world, but that there is a principle of wisdom and goodness presiding over all, and believe that nothing can come to pass without the knowledge and intention of this infinite wisdom and goodness, the gloom vanishes, and day-light bursts upon us. For though we be still at a loss to account for particular events, and do not distinctly see their tendency to good, our firm persuasion that good is intended, and will be the result of the whole scheme, is not at all shaken; and then nothing will remain but a pleasing curiosity with respect to the manner in which the good will be produced. In the
midst

Divine Revelation.

9

midst of calamity we can, with this persuasion, live a life of faith, and of joy. With the devout psalmist, we can say, *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice. For though clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the foundations of his throne.*

Thus does the belief of a God and a providence contribute to make a man a much greater and happier being than he otherwise could be. It enlarges his view of the system of nature, of which he is a part. It discovers to him his connexion with, and his interest in, other beings, and other things. It leads him to look backward to the origin of things, and forward to the termination of the great drama, and to believe that it will be most glorious and happy.

This end will be much farther promoted by the great doctrine of revelation, that this life is not the whole of our existence, that it is only a state of probation and discipline, calculated to train us up for a future and more glorious state after death. How different, and how superior, a Being must this view, properly impressed upon the mind, make

make a man. It is a difference not easy to describe, but it may be felt. A Being of a day will have his views, thoughts, and schemes, adapted to a day. To-morrow cannot interest him, because he has no interest in it. If he like the scenes of the day, to which his existence is confined, his heart must sicken at the idea of any thing beyond it, because he is totally excluded from it.

What then must be the feelings of the man who truly and habitually believes that he is born for eternity; that years and ages bear no sensible proportion to the term of his existence; that the duration of the sun, moon, and stars, is no more than a period that divides his existence, and assists him in measuring it; that when they shall be no more, he only, as it were, begins to be, and that other suns and other worlds will be equally short lived with respect to him. How sublime, and how animating, is the thought. Can any thing mean and sordid occupy the breast of a being who is persuaded of this grand destination? Will he not overlook every thing temporary, and
be

be ever stretching his thoughts to things eternal, in which his interest is infinitely greater than in any thing here :

We think highly, and justly so, of the advantage which an acquaintance with history gives a man over one who has no knowledge of any events besides those of his own times. We are highly gratified in being made acquainted with the origin, and early history, of the country in which we were born, and of the nation to which we belong. We are sensible that *travelling*, and seeing other countries, and other customs, than our own, improves and enlarges the mind. It adds to our stock of ideas, and gives us a greater field for contemplation. It is thereby the means of removing local prejudices, and of lessening the influence of all ideas connected with that of self.

What, then, must it be to be enabled, by the help of revelation, to look so far back as to the origin of the world, to range through all the successive dispensations of God to man, to contemplate more especially the promulgation of the gospel, and to look forward to that glorious state of things which is to take place

place in consequence of its universal spread ; to look farther still to the resurrection of the dead, and the day of final judgment, followed by a never-ending eternity ?

What a fund of great thoughts do these great subjects supply, and how scanty must be the furniture of that man's mind, let him be a philosopher, an historian, a statesman, or whatever else the world can make him, or he can make himself, compared with that of the meanest Christian, to whom these great and extensive views of things are familiar.

The contemplation of such objects as these is sufficient to raise a man above the world, and all the little pursuits and gratifications of it. Will such a man as this bestow much thought on the indulgence of his appetites and passions ? Will he envy any man the enjoyment of any thing that this world can give him ? or will he have a wish to aggrandize himself, or his family, in it ?

He will, on the contrary, be rather apt to despise it too much, so as to attend too little to his proper duty in it, so engrossed
will

will his mind be with things of infinitely greater magnitude and importance. This would unavoidably be the case, were it not that things *temporal*, though of little moment in themselves, have the advantage of being present; whereas things *eternal*, though infinitely momentous, are distant. But, my brethren, faith can bring them near, and give them an influence as if they were present: *Faith*, as the apostle says, *is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things unseen.*

If these be the true sources of that comprehension of mind which gives one man a superiority over another; if, as is commonly, and justly, said, it be *great thoughts* that *make great minds*, little cause has the poor Christian to envy even the most enlightened, and still less scholars in general who are not Christians. The study of the scriptures alone contributes so much to this great end, that all that learning can do more is a mere trifle, and without it infinitely little. The best-informed unbeliever has but a scanty furniture of mind, few elements, as we may say, of greatness, dignity,

dignity, and happiness, compared with the most unlearned Christian ; and with respect to proper intellectual improvement, ought to rank far below him. He has comparatively, though more in number, yet much smaller objects to contemplate ; and what is of more consequence, he is much more in danger of giving into low pursuits and gratifications, which debase the nature of man, and render him of little value in society.

All the greater virtues, such as patience in suffering, forgiveness of injuries, general benevolence, and habitual devotion, imply great comprehension of mind, or an union of more ideas and impressions than the present moment would furnish ; but with them the mind of a Christian is already furnished, and therefore those sublime virtues are easily acquired by a Christian, and not easily, if at all, by those who are not Christians.

We all begin our career in intellectual life with mere selfishness, attending to impressions made upon us by means of the external senses ; for we have no other inlets of ideas or knowledge. Of course, we are
for

for some time wholly occupied about ourselves, and do not learn to look beyond ourselves, and to feel for others, but in consequence of experience, aided by reflection, which joins distant ideas to those that are present. And no reflection is of so much use in carrying us beyond ourselves, and inspiring benevolence for others, as that of all mankind having one common parent, of our being training by him in the same school of discipline here, and our being heirs of the same hope of immortal life hereafter. For want of these great views, unbelievers cannot so easily look beyond themselves, and interest themselves for others.

With respect to patience and forbearance, they are virtues that can only rise out of reflection ; for the pressure of pain, and evils of any kind, naturally makes men impatient, wishing and endeavouring to procure immediate relief. It is thinking, and taking distant views of things, that make men patient, and we are best enabled to bear present evils by means of a firm belief

lief in the justice and goodness of that Being from whom we believe they come. But a person who never looks to this *first cause*, will naturally indulge to fretfulness, impatience, and resentment, against *second causes*, the immediate occasion of his sufferings; which a Christian considers as the mere instruments in the hand of another, and that the most benevolent of all Beings.

The first feeling of injury prompts to resentment and malice. But when a man can look beyond the first impression, the immediate occasion and instrument of the evils he experiences; when he thinks how little it is in the power of any person to injure him, that whatever is done to him is by the permission of God, who has the best intentions in permitting and appointing every thing, he attends so little to *second causes*, as to feel no resentment at all. Like David, with respect to Shimei, he can say, *Let him curse, since God hath bidden him curse*; and like our Saviour he can say, with respect to all his enemies, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Thus

Thus in suppressing resentment and forgiving injuries there is true greatness of mind, and in revenge real littleness.

That greatest of all virtues, and the immediate parent of several others, *habitual devotion*, naturally arises from considering the Supreme Being as the proper cause of all events, and at the same time as our proper parent, benefactor, moral governor, and final judge. This faith will inspire the mind with the greatest reverence for God, with respect for his authority, and intense confidence in the dispensations of his providence. With this faith we shall live as constantly *seeing*, and having intercourse with, *him that is invisible*; and a more elevated, dignified, and happy state of mind cannot be conceived.

But the man who either believes that there is no God, or who lives without him in the world, wholly thoughtless of his being, his perfection, and his providence, cannot attain to this elevation, and serene happiness. His views are bounded by the creature, and he never looks up to the Creator. If he have any remains of pious

C sentiments

sentiments from early impressions not altogether effaced, the idea of God will even give him pain and displeasure. He will profane his name in oaths and execrations, and make a mock of things the most sacred; a sure mark of a low, as well as of a depraved mind.

With the rejection of Christianity an attentive observer will always find the loss, or diminution, of these more sublime virtues. For they necessarily depend upon a regard to providence, and a future state; and it is generally attended with an evident debasement of character, by sinking into low vices, debauchery, and profaneness; or if external virtue be preserved from habit, and some of the greater kinds, as public spirit, and generosity, be cherished, it is from such principles as cannot be depended upon with respect to the bulk of mankind, viz. an enlightened selfishness, and a regard to posthumous fame; and these will operate more upon great occasions, than in the uniform tenor of peaceful life.

To the sublime consolations of religion,
which are most wanted in the evening of
life,

life, unbelievers must necessarily be strangers. And if there be a happy season for man in this life, it is that which is enjoyed towards the close of it ; when the labours of life are nearly over, when the dangers of virtue are passed, and a calm retrospect can be taken of the course of divine providence respecting ourselves, our dearest interests, and the world, from an unshaken faith in a righteous and benevolent Governor of the universe ; and when a joyful prospect of immortality can be indulged without alloy. In this state of mind the prospect of death itself is pleasing. Having seen, and enjoyed, enough of this life, a good man looks forward with pleasing expectation towards another, singing the Christian's triumphant song, *O Death where is thy sting, O Grave where is thy victory.*

I shall now conclude with a few reflections.

1. As true dignity and comprehension of mind cannot be attained without a previous progressive state, beginning with the most limited views, so it may have been necessary, that the world itself, including

the human species, as a part of it, should go through a previous imperfect state before it arrive at that happy one, in which, from the prophecies of scripture, we are led to expect, that it will terminate it; and that, in a way which we may not be able distinctly to see at present, it may contribute, and be really necessary, to that glorious catastrophe.

The world has indeed continued in a comparatively low and wretched state, full of vice and misery, men having, by their ambition and other ungoverned passions, been the cause of much evil, instead of happiness, to each other, for many ages. But long as the period appears, it may be no more with respect to the duration of the world, than infancy, or childhood, is to the age of man. And hereafter the wisdom and goodness of God may be as easily vindicated with respect to the one, as it is with respect to the other. Let us apply the same observation to the corruptions of true religion. They may hereafter appear to have been equally necessary to the perfect understanding, to the firm establishment,
and

and consequently to the happy effects of it, in future time.

2. Let us all, sensible of the great importance of true religion, do every thing in our power to extend the knowledge and the influence of it wherever we have opportunity. To this end let us labour to get just views of it ourselves, in order that we may give a just representation of it to others. And the true doctrine of the scriptures concerning the unity of God, and the placability of his nature, are in themselves infinitely more agreeable to reason, than the doctrines of a multiplicity of Gods, or which comes to the same thing, of different persons in the godhead, and of his implacability to repenting sinners, without an adequate satisfaction and atonement, and they have a much more pleasing and happy effect upon the mind that contemplates them.

If the pursuit of revenge imply a littleness in the mind of a *man* who gives way to it, it must give us a like low and degrading idea of *God*, and consequently tend to give the same turn to his worshippers, and imitators. And if the belief of a multipli-

city of deities (all of whom are, of course, supposed necessary to the work of creation and providence) imply imperfection in them all, it must proportionably lessen our reverence, and debase our devotion.

On the contrary, nothing can be more sublime in itself, or tend more to elevate the mind that contemplates it, than the idea of one great Being, one all-comprehensive mind, equal to the whole work of creation and providence. By the utmost efforts of our minds we cannot attain to more than a very imperfect idea of such a Being as this. But the very attempt to contemplate it fills the mind with the deepest reverence, and the most joyful confidence, and likewise tends to engage our obedience to his will. Also in the habitual endeavour to resemble the great object of our worship, we shall study *to purify ourselves, even as he is pure,*

Lastly, If we would derive real advantage from Christianity ourselves, and recommend it to others, we must give due and habitual attention to the great principles of it. We must, with the psalmist,
meditate

meditate on these things day and night, and thereby make them familiar to our minds. We must not only know, but be intimately conversant with, the scriptures, which are the only records of this great revelation, and feel an increasing satisfaction in reading and meditating on their important contents. Otherwise, we shall be Christians in *name* only, and mere men of the world in reality.

It is not what we think of only occasionally, but what habitually occupies our thoughts, that forms the mind, and the character; and this will be discovered by the mind involuntarily reverting to it, and taking pleasure to dwell upon it. Is the man of business, or the man of science, formed without much attention to his object, and taking pleasure in it? You know the contrary. Expect not then to become Christians in any other way. You must prize your religion above every thing else, and be ready to sacrifice every thing else to it. It is only when we thus make religion our principal object, that the gospel will teach, and enable, us to *deny all ungodliness*

and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and piously, in this present world, so as to encourage us to look forwards to that blessed hope, even the glorious appearance of the great God, and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in that great and triumphant day, when corruption shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE II.

Revelation the only Remedy for Idolatry and Superstition.

The time of their ignorance God winked at.

ACTS, xviii. 30.

THE sufficiency of reason, or the light of nature, for the discovery of all useful truth, has been the great boast of unbelievers in divine revelation. But this idea has been the offspring of a conceit of the powers of the human intellect, in consequence of knowledge acquired in an advanced period of the world, without considering by how slow degrees that knowledge was attained, and especially how much of it was, in reality, derived from that very revelation which they consider as unnecessary.

Without positive instruction, mankind, in the earliest ages, must have been entirely ignorant of every thing on which their existence

istence and happiness most depended. Seeing nothing but *effects*, and unable to trace their true *causes*, they must have wandered in a boundless field of conjecture, of which we see the mind of man to be always exceedingly fertile. Soon finding that there is no effect without some adequate cause, men, who have naturally but little patience of investigation (for it is only experience that teaches this) presently imagine something or other to be the cause of every thing that they observe, and they acquiesce in this supposed cause till farther observation shall convince them of their mistake. But what is most to be regretted, is, that an opinion of this kind once entertained, especially when it has been recommended by a derivation from remote antiquity, does not easily give way to better judgment.

Whoever were the first of the human race, and by whatever means they came into existence, unless the course of nature was wholly different from what it is known to be now, they must have perished without foreign assistance. Whether men were
produced

produced in a state of infancy, or of perfect manhood, will make no difference; because our ideas, the elements of all our knowledge, have no inlets besides the external senses, and these must be used and exercised before they can give us any information of things without us; and these ideas must be variously combined and compared, before we could, by their means, form any proper judgment of things, or take any proper and safe measures for our conduct. A child left to itself would be more helpless than any other young animal. It must necessarily perish; and a grown man, with no more knowledge than a new-born child, would be as little able to take care of himself. Whenever, therefore, men were first produced, they must have had some instructions communicated to them by their maker; so that what we may properly call *divine revelation* was absolutely necessary in the first stage of our existence.

It is agreeable, however, to the general plan of providence, that no more supernatural

tural instruction be given to men than is absolutely necessary to their well being; and where their own reason and observation were able, in any good measure, to answer the purpose, they have been left to its guidance; though in this case much error, and much inconvenience, have arisen from the false judgments that men, thus left to their own experience and observation, will fall into. One reason of this may be, that knowledge acquired by experience is of much more value than that which is acquired by instruction. It makes a much deeper impression, so as to be more surely retained, and more effectually applied in the conduct of life. This we see in all children. One fall, and consequent hurt, will teach them caution infinitely better than any admonitions of their parents or guides.

Now it has pleased our universal parent to trust the whole human race as we, if we act wisely, treat children, *i. e.* leave them as much as they safely may be to themselves, interposing only to prevent some great

great and fatal evil, of which it was impossible that they should be sufficiently apprized themselves. And if we consider the state of the world in very early ages, destitute of the knowledge that has since been acquired by experience and observation, and the lights that have been derived from revelation, we shall be convinced that some supernatural instruction was highly expedient, if not absolutely necessary, if it was the ultimate intention of our Maker to train men to virtue here, and happiness hereafter.

It has pleased divine providence to leave so many of the human race in this state of natural ignorance ; and the consequence of it has been so fatal, that we see the greatest reason to be thankful for that supernatural instruction which has been afforded to some, and which has, by their means, been communicated to others. But many persons in this advanced age of the world have no idea how great the ignorance of the early ages was, or of what mankind have suffered in consequence of it. It may, therefore,

therefore, be of use to state a few unquestionable facts, in order to demonstrate this, and to shew that the greater light we now enjoy did not, in reality, come from the use of reason, but from another and higher source.

Whatever the first parents of the human race might have been taught themselves, and endeavoured to teach their posterity, unquestionable history carries us back to a period in which all mankind, with very few exceptions, and those not of a people the most famed for their wisdom, imagined there was a multiplicity of superior Beings directing the affairs of the world; that these deities were of very different dispositions and characters, some disposed to do good, and others to do evil, to men; and that their favour was to be procured by rites and ceremonies instituted in their honour, and frequently by actions, some of which are now universally deemed abominable, and others cruel; so that what was called *religion*, was far from having any connexion with good morals.

Divination, magical arts, and necromancy, were also an important part of the heathen religions. They had a great variety of rules by which to judge of the good or bad success of their schemes and projects, especially appearances in their sacrifices, as the form and position of the entrails of the beasts slain, &c. And in order to gain favour, or ensure revenge, they had recourse to various practices, which they had been led to believe had a connexion with the object of their wishes. Also, what to us appears most extraordinary, but it is not the less true, is, that the more ingenious, and the more highly civilized, any of these antient nations were, the greater was the number of their superstitious observances.

The proper cause of these wretched superstitions, was, as the apostle justly calls it, *ignorance*. It was men's ignorance of nature, and of the true causes of events: but such ignorance as it was not in their power wholly to remove. Things were continually happening unexpected by them,
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the causes of them being what they could not see or comprehend, and therefore they concluded, that the cause was some invisible power, the agency of which no human power or sagacity could control. But, as at first they had no idea of any thing absolutely *invisible*, they ascribed these events to the influence of such visible objects as the sun, moon, and stars, the greatest and most powerful of the visible agents in nature; imagining that the good and evil which they did proceeded from design, and therefore either that they were themselves intelligent Beings, or actuated by intelligent Beings residing in them, and directing their influence.

Though mankind in general might retain the idea of one supreme mind, which had been communicated to them by their first parents, yet not being able to conceive how one mind could sufficiently attend to every thing, they might think there were inferior intelligences, to whom different departments in the government of the world were delegated. And, from this principle,
directing

directing their chief attention to these Beings, with whom they supposed they had more immediately to do, they would in time entirely lose sight of the one Supreme. They would have no act of worship directed to him, but would confine their regards to the inferior, and therefore imperfect Beings; and they would unavoidably form their ideas of their *characters* from what they supposed to proceed from them; judging from what they felt themselves, and observed in other persons, what they must be, in order to *do* as they did.

Accordingly, we find among Heathen nations characters of their gods, little, if at all, superior to those of men; some revengeful, some capricious, and some even libidinous; for proof of which we need only appeal to Homer, and the Grecian mythology in general. It was in order to render themselves acceptable to some of these deities that they inflicted the greatest cruelties upon others, and even upon themselves, courting their favour by the most expensive sacrifices, and the most painful mortifications; and to recommend them-

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selves to others, they indulged in such abominable practices, as on any other occasion they could not help regarding with detestation.

When once the worship of the one true God, a Being of perfect purity, as well as infinitely powerful and benevolent, was abandoned, the rest followed of course; and that it was natural, is evident from a similar idolatry, and similar rites of worship, having been instituted in all ages, and in all parts of the world, among the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, and also in Hindostan, Mexico, and Peru.

We shall not much wonder at mankind in very early ages imagining such bodies as the sun, moon, and stars, and other natural objects, to be animated, if we consider how prone children are to personify every thing that affects them, so as to feel real anger against any thing that is the occasion of pain to them. Even many persons grown up will frequently, before they reflect, be affected in a similar manner. Whole nations of men, whose minds have not been cultivated, at this very day entertain notions exactly similar to those of the antients, which

which led the way to idolatry. Thus the people of Sumatra, as Dr. Marsden inform us, have the most superstitious respect for the sea, imagining its various motions to be voluntary, and not the effect of the action of the wind upon it.

The arts of magic and divination were equally owing to men's ignorance of the natural causes of events, and their taking up with fanciful causes instead of them. Nor shall we wonder at the superstition of the antients, when we reflect upon similar superstition, owing to similar ignorance, in many persons of this enlightened age, in all countries, Christians not excepted.

The antient Greeks and Romans, in order to obtain their revenge upon any person, made images of wax, wool, and other things, with certain ceremonies, and supposed that by melting, tearing, and otherwise abusing those images, the persons whom they represented would suffer in the same manner. But notions exactly similar to these (the remains, no doubt, of Heathen superstition) exist at this very day. I myself was intimately acquainted with a per-

son of considerable property, who, imagining his sheep to have suffered by witchcraft, drove a stake through one of them while it was alive, and left it to perish in that condition; really thinking that the person who had bewitched them would perish at the same time that the sheep did, though it was not possible for him to have any idea of the manner in which the suffering of the animal could be the cause of the suffering of the witch; and it was not in my power, though he was a man of much knowledge of the world, and of good sense in other respects, to convince him that he had done wrong.

How many have there been, if they cannot be so readily found at present, who have professed to cure wounds by practising on the weapon with which they were made, to cure warts by burying in the ground pieces of flesh with which they have been rubbed, which flesh, it is further curious to observe, must have been stolen; and how many are there who still pretend to cure the ague, and other diseases, by various *charms*, without any proper

per medical treatment. All these practices were suggested by ideas exactly similar to those which were the foundation of all the superstition and idolatry of the Heathens ; proceeding from an equal ignorance of the causes of natural effects, and men's substituting imaginary causes in their places.

The antient Heathens judged of the success of enterprizes by certain animals crossing their paths in particular directions, or certain birds appearing to the right hand or to the left of them. But there are similar appearances that are deemed lucky or unlucky among all ignorant persons. Do not sailors fancy they can procure a wind by whistling ? and do not some gamesters really think to change their *luck*, as they call it, at cards, by changing their places at the table, or even turning round their chairs ? Where there is equal ignorance, there will be equal superstition. As to fortune-telling by numberless appearances, and by astrology, or the positions of the stars and planets, there is at this day almost as much of it in practice, among ignorant peo-

ple, persons of fortune and fashion by no means excepted, as ever there was. We shall not wonder at the origin and progress of Heathen superstition, and Heathen idolatry, if we reflect upon what passes under our own eyes.

We shall not wonder at the long continuance of antient superstitions, unsupported as they are by facts and experience, if we consider, that whatever becomes generally believed, on whatever ground, continues to be believed; the faith of the father being, in most cases, easily transmitted to the son, without any examination of his own, from his having seen no reason to distrust it. Also a single fact favourable to an established opinion will be more talked of, and thereby make more impression, than many that are unfavourable to it, which will be accounted for on some principle or other, so as not to invalidate the general maxim.

This we see in various ill-founded prognostics concerning the weather, from its raining, or not raining, on particular days in the week, at certain seasons of the year; which you will hear recited, and asserted
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to have been confirmed by the uniform experience of old men, who received them from their fathers, who likewise attested their truth ; though you well know that it is impossible, in the nature of things, that they should have any just foundation at all. In fact, rules concerning the weather depending on the moon are no better founded, though they retain almost universal credit. Indications of the future fortune of persons from moles, and other natural marks on their bodies, though laughed at by men of sense, are still regarded by the vulgar. Being of great antiquity, even such silly maxims as these will not soon be universally given up.

Now considering the shocking and abominable nature of the practices which are known to have prevailed among the Heathens, as belonging to their religion, which nothing but a deeper knowledge of nature than they had any means of attaining could prevent, was it not wise, and kind, in the universal parent of mankind, to interpose, and forbid such hurtful practices, by instituting a religion that should be favourable

to decency and good morals? And such was the religion of the patriarchs and of the Jews.

This was the only religion that taught the great doctrine of the unity of God, the maker and immediate governor of all things, that this God is omnipresent and omniscient, possessed of infinite power, wisdom, and godness; and every thing tending to impurity or cruelty was strictly forbidden in his worship. Doctrines so truly sublime, and so favourable to virtue, we in vain look for in the religion of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Tyrians, or any other antient nations, the most famed for their civilization and knowledge.

These doctrines we are taught in our catechisms. They are consequently among the earliest impressions on our minds, and therefore we are apt to think them *natural*, and of easy acquirement. But the history of all ages and nations proves the contrary. And if we duly reflect upon the subject, we shall be sensible that the doctrines of the unity of God, of his immediate universal government, and his perfect benevolence,

lence, were far too sublime for the early comprehension of mankind. The infinite variety of objects in nature, and of events in life, would naturally suggest the idea of various, and variously disposed, Beings for the authors of them, just as different kinds of productions, and actions, are naturally ascribed to different characters in men.

It is true that there is, in reality, an *uniformity*, and an *unity of design*, in the works of nature and providence ; but this is not easily discovered. The first thing that strikes us is the infinite *diversity* of objects, some affecting us agreeably, and others disagreeably, some good, and others, as we are apt to think, evil ; and hence naturally arises the doctrine of at least *two principles* in nature, and these opposite to one another. And though, since there is a prevalence of good, it was concluded that the good principle was superior to the evil one, yet it would not seem that the good principle could wholly exclude the evil one ; and since men have universally thought it more behoved them to conciliate the favour of evil Beings, than that of good ones, who
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were not disposed to injure them, hence the great prevalence of rites of a horrid and disgusting nature, in all the Heathen religions.

That mankind, if left to themselves, would ever have attained to the idea of one supreme, uncontrolled cause, without whose appointment or permission nothing can ever come to pass, and that nothing comes to pass but what has the best tendency, being really, though not apparently, subservient to good, is highly improbable. Still less probable is it, that the moral character of the one cause of all things should have been so established, as to be the foundation of a rational and useful worship. So far were men, though with every advantage of cultivation in other respects, from this degree of knowledge, that though it is probable that just maxims of religion were communicated to the first parents of mankind, appearances in nature were thought to be so unfavourable to them, that they became extinct, and a monstrous polytheism, the parent of the most abominable licentiousness, universally prevailed.

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So prone are men to entertain an idea of different deities, superintending different provinces in nature, and the administration of human affairs, that even after the dispensation of the gospel, when it might be thought that the doctrine of the unity of God, and the administration of providence by himself, on which so much stress is laid in the scriptures, had been fully established, idolatry again crept into the worship of imperfect mortals. The human mind was again distracted, and the human character again debased, by an attention to a multiplicity of objects of worship, and the one true God was again overlooked, even by Christians.

Wholly occupied in their devotion to the virgin Mary, and innumerable other saints and angels, whom alone the superstitious Catholics address on all the different occasions of human life, one, for example, for sailors, and others for other descriptions of men, or men in other situations, the worship of Christians came to have as many objects as that of the Heathens. Christian idolatry had, however, this advantage over Heathen-

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ism, that no Christian saint was the patron of vice, though its influence with respect to morals was greatly diminished; many substitutes being provided for moral virtue, which the worship of one God, and that a Being of perfect purity, would never have admitted.

How, then, does experience, or observation, justify us in supposing that supernatural instruction was not necessary with respect to the great articles of the unity of God, and the purity of his worship, as a guard against immorality in the worshippers? As it were to convince us of the contrary, God was pleased to permit whole nations of men, the most famed for their wisdom and knowledge in other respects, to sink into the most deplorable ignorance of his nature and worship, teaching a chosen and despised few the true knowledge of himself, and the purity of his worship, and by their means gradually enlightening the minds of the rest of mankind; and thankful should we be that this salutary light has reached us.

If we consider (but few persons have sufficient

tion from a Being who knew more of the real laws of nature, and the true causes of events, than any of the human race; and who did not choose that this deplorable ignorance, so debasing to the mind, and so prejudicial to men's affairs, should be universal; but that one nation, by no means so much improved in other respects as their neighbours, should be free from it; and that by their means this freedom from superstition, as well as idolatry, should be extended to all the world.

How prone men are to superstition, we see even among Christians, notwithstanding the light of divine revelation, and not only in the remains of Heathenism, which are numberless among the common people in all Christian countries, but in things peculiar to Christianity. Whatever connects the favour of God and future happiness with any thing besides moral virtue, is superstition, and of a most debasing and mischievous nature; and yet almost the whole of what is called Popery is of this kind. Time was when a man who had endowed a church, made a pilgrimage, confessed to a priest,

priest, discharged his penance, received absolution, and was buried in the habit of a Franciscan monk, or who had provided for masses to be said for him after he was dead, thought himself as sure of the happiness of Heaven as if he had kept all the commandments of God. And too many there are, even among Protestants, who are far from laying the stress that they ought to do upon their own personal virtue.

The scriptures, however, teach the soundest and purest morality, free from every thing approaching to superstition; and when they shall be thoroughly understood, and duly attended to, but not till then, this miserable, debasing superstition will be banished the world. And then will our undivided homage be paid to the one living and true God, the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he will be worshipped by purity of heart and integrity of life, in *spirit and in truth*. But it is revelation only that supplies the proper and effectual cure of superstition, in this form, as well as in every other, assigning the true cause of the desired effect.

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More, evidently, still, are we indebted to revelation, and not at all to human reason, however cultivated, for the knowledge of a *future state*. The thicker is the veil that nature throws over every thing belonging to the state of the dead, the more busy has the imagination of man been in prying into it. When it had been imagined, that not only the celestial bodies, but the earth, seas, rivers, trees, and all the inanimate parts of nature, had some invisible power accompanying them, so that they could be invoked, and their assistance engaged by men, a similar invisible power, or principle, was soon supposed to reside in men and other animals, and even to remain with them after they were dead, so that dead men became the objects of worship, as well as other parts of nature.

Dead men, however, appear to have been invoked for the purpose of necromancy, or in order to pry into futurity, before they were made the proper objects of worship, or ranked among the *gods*, capable of doing good or evil to living men ; and this practice took place before they had any distinct

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idea of an immaterial soul. For when, in consequence of these arts of necromancy, used by the witch of Endor, Samuel was supposed to be raised from the dead, there was the appearance of an old man, habited just as Samuel had been, rising out of the earth, which could not have been the natural place of an immaterial soul; and it is not called the soul of Samuel, but Samuel himself. Nor is there in the scriptures any mention of the soul of any particular person as a substance distinct from the body, either as existing in this life, or in another. The rich man and Lazarus, in our Saviour's parable, are not described as the souls of those men, but as the men themselves, supposed to be removed into another state.

On whatever principle it was that dead men were thought to be accessible to the living, the modes of application to them, in the arts of necromancy, form a great part of the religion of all the antient nations; and by this they not only miserably bewildered themselves, and lost their time in a fruitless pursuit, but were led, as is well

well known, to some horrid and cruel practices, numberless living persons having been sacrificed to the manes of the dead.

Among the Jews alone, of all the nations of the world, were the detestable arts of necromancy strictly forbidden. Their religion was the only one that was free from this great stain. Now, to what could this remarkable exception have been owing, but to a wisdom superior to their own; or to that of man; which, before they themselves could have discovered that the practices were vain, prevented their adopting them, and revealed to them what is really true, and most important, with respect to the state of the dead, and which no human reason could ever have discovered, viz. that at a future period they are all to rise again, when all men will receive according to their works.

This is the great and peculiar doctrine of revelation, and especially of the New Testament, Jesus Christ having been commissioned *to bring life and immortality to light by his gospel*, giving the most ample proof of a divine mission, by working un-

questionable miracles, and what is more, himself dying in the most public manner, and rising again within a limited time, as the most satisfactory proof, and exemplification, of his doctrine.

To this divine light let us diligently attend, and be thankful to the great Father of lights that to us, in this remote part of the world, *so great a light has shined*. Let us rejoice that we are called out of the state of Heathenish darkness and superstition that I have described to you, and which it pleased God, in his infinite wisdom, so long to wink at. But *now*, as the apostle continues, *he calls upon all men every where to repent, since he has appointed a day, and given sufficient notice of it, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he has ordained, even Jesus Christ.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE III.

Of the Miracles by which the Deliverance of the Israelites from their Bondage in Egypt was effected.

And Israel saw the great works which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and his servant Moses.

EXOD. xiv. 31.

THERE is nothing so interesting to man as the intercourse he has with his Maker, because his happiness is most nearly concerned in it; and the more interested we are in any thing, the more it behoves us to see that we be not imposed upon, but that we have sufficient ground for our belief. Reason and revelation are equally enemies to implicit faith, and require that we do not give our assent to important propositions without the most satisfactory evidence.

Though when any object of faith is of a
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pleasing nature, we may be thought disposed to take up with less evidence, yet the magnitude of any thing will always require a proportionably clear proof. Thus we cannot doubt but that the apostles were pleased with the idea of their master's resurrection, yet the greatness of the event begat a disposition to incredulity; and we read that when they were first informed of it, and upon no apparently suspicious ground, *they believed not through joy*. They thought the news too good to be true, and they did not give their full assent to the joyful tidings till they had the most overbearing evidence, such as no disposition to incredulity could resist.

It behoves us, therefore, to examine with the most scrupulous attention every circumstance in histories of intercourse between God and man; and at this time I shall select for your attentive consideration, the first of which we have an account from eye-witnesses, I mean the deliverance of the Israelites from their state of servitude in Egypt, and the promulgation of the law from Mount Sinai, recorded in the writings

ings of Moses, who was himself the chief instrument in these wonderful events.

Prior to this the Israelites had been in Egypt about two hundred years, about the latter half of which term they had been reduced to a state of the most abject servitude. This was evidently the case at the birth of Moses, who was himself saved in an extraordinary manner from being drowned, in consequence of an order to throw every male child of the Israelites into the river, and he was eighty years old when he received his commission to effect their deliverance. It is probable, therefore, that they had been enslaved, and oppressed, in various forms, about a hundred years, though the order for the destruction of the male children had been withdrawn.

During this period of extreme oppression it is probable that the Israelites had in general ceased to worship the God of their fathers, and had conformed to the superstitions of their masters, which they would do the more readily from seeing the very flourishing state they were in, and their

own abject condition. For, in all the early ages of the world, outward prosperity was considered as the consequence of the public religion of any people; and the better condition of any nation with respect to any other, as a proof of the superiority of the gods they worshipped.

God had informed Abraham, that his posterity would be in bondage in Egypt; but that after four hundred years (reckoning, as it appears, from the time of the prediction) they would be delivered, and become a great nation. This promise, however, they seem to have forgotten, or to have lost all faith in. Moses himself had abandoned his countrymen, and had been forty years resident in Arabia, where he had married a wife, so that it is probable he had no expectation of any thing very flattering being reserved for his nation. He had even neglected the rite of circumcision, which was the peculiar symbol of the divine promise to the descendants of Abraham. For it was only in consequence of the interposition of an angel, or some supernatural appearance, that he

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was compelled to perform this rite on his son, on his return to Egypt.

In this situation of things there did not appear to be any prospect of relief from this state of bondage. And, alarmed as the Egyptians were at the increase of the Israelites, it may be taken for granted that the use of arms was strictly forbidden them, while their masters appear to have been the most warlike people in that age of the world; having not only an armed infantry, but multitudes of horses and chariots for war.

Supposing the Israelites to have been so oppressed as to be driven to despair, and to have come to a determination to abandon the country at all events, it is probable that they would have sought some place of retreat, where they were likely to meet with the least resistance, either from the country being thinly inhabited, or inhabited by an unwarlike people. But instead of this, they not only emancipate themselves, but take possession of a country inhabited by the most warlike people in the world next to their masters, if they were
not

not equal to them. For the inhabitants of Canaan were likewise practised in war, and had horses and chariots like the Egyptians. And this warlike people was not taken by surprise, but had sufficient notice of the invasion, and, no doubt, took every measure in their power to defeat it.

By what means, then, was this extraordinary deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, and their settlement in the land of Canaan, effected? Moses, whose account was written at the time, and with all the minuteness, and other marks of authenticity, of any modern journal, informs us, that it was in consequence of a series of miraculous interpositions; and his account was received as genuine and unquestionable by those who were the best judges of its truth; viz. those among whom it was written; and it continues to be believed by them to this day, though they were frequently indisposed to the religious institutions which were enjoined them in consequence of this very deliverance.

The substance of the account given by
Moses

Moses is as follows. While he was in Arabia, where he had resided forty years, following his occupation of a shepherd, the appearance of a flame of fire in a bush, which was not consumed by it, attracted his attention. On his approach to it, an audible voice issued out of it, from a person who announced himself to be the God of his fathers, who had seen the affliction of his people, and commissioned him to go and deliver them. When he hesitated, and shewed the most extreme backwardness to undertake the commission, and said that his nation would not believe that God had sent him, he was ordered to throw down the staff that was in his hand, when it instantly became a serpent, and then to take it up, when it became a staff again in his hand. He was likewise directed to stretch forth his hand, when it became leprous, and to pull it to him again, when it was restored sound as before.

These extraordinary appearances convinced *him* that the Being by whom he was addressed was, indeed, the God of his fathers, to whom similar instances of power had

had been ascribed. He, therefore, though with extreme reluctance, went to the heads of his nation, and, as he had been ordered, exhibited the same miracles before them, who were thereby convinced that God had sent him. He then went to Pharaoh, and openly demanded leave for his countrymen to go into the wilderness, in order to make a sacrifice to their own God; and after repeated miracles, to convince him of the authority with which he made the demand, some of which consisted of the most awful judgments upon him and his nation, Pharaoh's consent was obtained. But repenting of his compliance, he pursued them, and following them through the red sea, which had divided to make way for them, he and his army perished. After this, according to the account of Moses, the Israelites entered the wilderness, where they were fed by a miracle forty years. We are also informed, that, after their leaving Egypt, God, in an audible voice, delivered to them the ten commandments from Mount Sinai, as the foundation of a new institution of religion, the particulars of which

which were communicated to Moses himself.

Let us now consider how this remarkable story is circumstanced with respect to its credibility, both in the age of Moses himself, and at this distance of time; who were the witnesses of these events, what motives they had to examine into their truth, and what effects they produced in their conduct.

It is evident, that neither the Israelites, nor the Egyptians, were at all predisposed to expect such events as are recorded. The Israelites seem to have given themselves up to despair, and to have acquiesced in their abject condition. Moses had fled, and seems to have had no thought of ever returning to Egypt; and the Egyptians were far from having any apprehensions of losing such an useful set of servants as the Israelites were; so that there does not appear to have been any sufficient natural cause of exciting the hopes of the one, or the fears of the other.

They who suppose that the Israelites were emancipated by natural means con-

sider Moses as a bold and able politician. But he does not appear, in the whole history, to have shewn either much courage, or much sagacity. He had nothing in him of an enterprising nature, and never had that confidence in himself which was necessary for so great an undertaking. Of this every part of his history, which is wonderfully consistent with itself, is a proof.

Had Moses been of an enterprising disposition, it would, no doubt, have appeared earlier, and would not have lain dormant till he was eighty years old, when he had resided so long in a foreign country as to be in a manner unknown to his countrymen, and not likely to have much influence with them. His having been educated in the court of Pharaoh, if it was not forgotten, would lead the Egyptians to watch him with the greatest care, so as to give him the fewest opportunities of exciting any revolt among his countrymen.

Had he had any scheme of this kind, he would, no doubt, have concealed himself among his countrymen, and would not
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have applied to Pharaoh till he had prepared them for resistance, and had taken his measures to defeat the attempts of the Egyptians to prevent their escape; whereas he appears to have used no precautions of this kind. No arms, or stores, were provided, no alliance made with other nations, and, in short, nothing was done which any sensible man must have seen to be necessary for the success of so great an enterprise.

The emancipation of the Israelites, therefore, in this state of things, does not appear to have been effected by the policy of man, and consequently it is the more probable, that, since it was effected, it was by the immediate hand of God, in the manner related by Moses.

Moses was neither a warrior, nor an orator, so that he was destitute of every natural requisite for such an undertaking as the emancipation of his countrymen from the power of the Egyptians. The impediment he had in his speech laid him under the necessity of employing his brother Aaron even to speak for him; and when, in the course of the history, a battle
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was to be fought, Joshua commanded, while he only prayed at a distance. Such was his diffidence of himself, that he was several times upon the point of abandoning his charge altogether, unable to contend with the many difficulties with which he was surrounded. When he was much embarrassed with business, he was relieved, not by any sagacity of his own, but by the sensible advice of his father-in-law Jethro.

Whatever Moses might have been taught of the learning of the Egyptians, it either amounted to very little, or, if it had any relation to the powers of nature, he retained but little of it, as he seems to have been, imposed upon by the tricks of the magicians, who imitated his miracles. For with the greatest simplicity he says, that those magicians did the very same that he did, in changing their rods into serpents, *Exod. vii. 11*, water into blood, *v. 22*, and in bringing frogs upon the land, *ch. viii. 7*. From this he would probably infer, that these magicians were assisted by some superior beings, but that the power of his God was greater than that of theirs. Of this

this he could have no doubt, from the serpent into which Aaron's rod was changed swallowing up those which had been substituted in the place of their rods, and especially from their not being able to remove the plagues with which his God had afflicted them.

As this persuasion was sufficient for his purpose, and would encourage him to persist in what he had undertaken, he was permitted, as far as appears, to remain ignorant of their arts. The frequent intervention of superior beings, and the power of certain forms of words and ceremonies, to bring down, and to direct, the agency of those beings, was the belief of all mankind in the early ages of the world; and it was nothing but Christianity, which led to the better philosophy of modern times, that has undeceived mankind in this respect. This belief has even still greater power over the vulgar in all Christian countries, *charms*, as they are called, being in daily use for the cure of disorders, and many other purposes. Moses had no doubt of the reality of his own miracles, being conscious that he had re-

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course to no artifice whatever ; and believing that the Egyptian priests had supernatural assistance of a similar nature, though inferior to that which accompanied him, he relates what appeared to him to be the fact, on both sides, with equal simplicity.

That the miracles of Moses could not have been any trick, is evident, from the magnitude of them, and from other circumstances attending them. In the first instance, it was not a small quantity of water, such as might have been contained in a basin, that appeared to have been converted into blood, or to become red like blood, which was probably all that the Egyptian magicians effected, and which many persons at this day could perform as well as they, but it was all the water of the river, so that the people could not make any use of it, but were obliged to dig wells. As the like has never happened to this river before, or to any other river since that time, it is evident that there must have been a miracle in the case. This change must also have affected the river through the whole of its extent, and have continued

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a considerable time, otherwise fresh water would soon have diluted the vitiated, and in a short time the river would have purged itself. Supposing this change in the river to have been introduced by some natural, but at present unknown, cause, yet as it had operated only at the time that Moses foretold that it would, there must have been something miraculous in his foreknowledge of that event ; for he could not himself have been able to effect what he declared would certainly come to pass.

This extraordinary miracle continued seven days, and by what means this change in the river ceased we are not told ; but presently after came the plague of frogs, which did not consist in the introduction of a few of them into one particular place, but infested the whole land of Egypt, and yet on the prayer of Moses they all died in the towns and villages in one day, and remained only in the river.

Allowing Moses to have learned some tricks of legerdemain of the Egyptian magicians, he could not have been more expert than his masters, especially as he had been

out of the country forty years, and in the mean time they could not have lost, but, probably, would have gained, skill in their arts, so that they might easily have detected any trick of his. Besides, he was but one man, or at most was only assisted by his brother Aaron; whereas they were many, which gives a great advantage in things of this nature.

In the next miracle all the dust in the land, it is said, became lice, both upon man and upon beast, that is, the quantity was so great, that it seemed as if all the dust of the country had been converted into lice. After this a swarm of flies filled the whole country, and yet, on the prayer of Moses, they were all removed, and not one remained.

In the next place, on the word of Moses, a grievous murrain fell upon all the cattle of Egypt, but not upon those of the Israelites, the day after it was threatened; and then, on the simple sprinkling of ashes into the air, the plague of boils came upon man and upon beast, and even upon the magicians themselves, while they stood in the presence of Moses and Pharaoh, which
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shews that they had no power to counteract that which accompanied Moses.

After this a grievous hail-storm, accompanied with thunder and lightning, a thing never known in that country, and so severe that not only the more tender herbs, but even the trees of the field, were broken by it ; and yet upon that part of the country which the Israelites inhabited there was no hail. This calamity, contrary to its usual nature, must have continued some time ; but at the entreaty of Pharaoh, and the prayer of Moses, it immediately ceased.

After the hail followed the locusts, which devoured every green thing in the whole land ; and this also, at the relenting of Pharaoh, and the prayer of Moses, was entirely removed.

The next miracle was an extraordinary darkness where the Egyptians lived, while it continued light with the Israelites. And the last miracle was of a still more extraordinary nature, viz. the death of the first-born, and of the first-born only, of man and of beast too, in one particular night, through the whole land of Egypt, while

not one of the Israelites died, and this peremptorily foretold before the event.

Things of this magnitude could never have been effected by art, and it is evident that the magicians of Egypt were sensible that they were produced by supernatural power. For upon the miracle of the lice they could not help confessing it. *This, said they, is the finger of God.* Exod. viii. 19. On this they desisted from making any more attempts to imitate the miracles of Moses, afraid, probably, to proceed any farther.

In order to commemorate the most extraordinary event, the sparing the first-born of Israel, while those of the Egyptians were destroyed, a peculiar rite was instituted, and announced before the event. It consisted of killing and eating a lamb with particular ceremonies at that time of every future year, to be continued as long as they should be a nation, the first time of celebration taking place on the very night on which the event to be commemorated happened. No record of any event could be more unexceptionable than this; so that the continuance of the custom, which all
Jews

Jews keep up to this day, is an unquestionable proof of the reality of the fact, much more than any other known custom is a proof of any other fact connected with it, as that of our making bonfires in commemoration of the gunpowder-plot in England; the event commemorated, and the sign of it, taking place at the same instant of time, and the event being recorded while it was fresh in the memory of all the witnesses of it, who were not a few individuals, but a whole nation, and that the least disposed to credulity, as their whole history, and their present character, abundantly prove.

The passage of the Israelites through the red sea was a miracle on a still larger scale, and had greater consequences, viz. the total destruction of Pharaoh's great host of armed chariots and horses, and of himself along with them. That this great event should be accounted for in a natural way is absolutely impossible. Had the waters been driven back by a strong wind, as nothing but the continued force of the wind could have kept them in that situation, it would

pressed in the song of Moses, Exod. xv. 14. *The people shall hear and be afraid, sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestine. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed, the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them. By the greatness of thine arm shall they be as still as a stone. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.*

We see the impression that these miracles made upon the Philistines remained upon their minds in the time of Samuel. For on the news of the ark being brought into the camp of the Israelites, they express the greatest apprehensions. 1 Sam. iv. 7. *And the Philistines were afraid; for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Wo unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. And in their consultations about sending back the ark, after they had suffered by detaining it, they say, 1 Sam. vi. 6, Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh*

Pharaoh hardened their hearts, when he had wrought wonderfully among them? Did they not let the people go, and they departed? We may judge from this how generally these extraordinary facts were at that time known, and what an idea they excited of the power of the God of Israel.

DISCOURSE IV.

Of the Delivery of the Law from Mount Sinai, and other Miracles in the Wilderness.

And Israel saw the great works which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and his servant Moses.

EXOD. xiv. 31.

IN discoursing from these words, I have begun to illustrate the evidence of the divine mission of Moses, or the credibility of the miracles on which it is founded. I have already considered those which were exhibited in Egypt, shewing, from their magnitude, and other circumstances, especially the effects which they produced, that there could not have been any imposition in the case. I now proceed to direct your attention to those which are recorded as having been exhibited in the wilderness, and they
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are of still greater magnitude and importance.

From the red sea the Israelites proceeded, without intermission, a journey of three days, through the wilderness of Shur, till they came to a place which was afterwards called Mara, where the people murmured because the waters were bitter, so that, though they were exhausted with thirst, they could not drink them. In this distressing situation, of which we, in this climate, can form but an imperfect idea, *the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?* EXOD. xv. 24. They would naturally imagine, that the same power which had brought them out of Egypt, in so wonderful a manner, would easily supply all their wants, and they would be much chagrined when they found themselves disappointed. This murmuring, however, did not imply any disbelief in the power of their God, or in the divine mission of Moses; and God was pleased to relieve their wants by directing Moses to cast a branch of a certain tree into the water,

ter, in consequence of which they were able to drink it.

In this place it appears that the people halted, and Moses took this opportunity of exhorting them; and making a kind of covenant with them in the name of God. *Exod. xv. 25. There he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases (or plagues) upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee.*

Notwithstanding this relief from the effects of thirst, the people finding a want of provisions (for what they had made in haste for their journey could not last long) after fifteen days from their leaving Egypt, they again murmured against Moses and Aaron, and repented that they had left Egypt. *Exod. xvi. 2. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses*

Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness; and the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, and when we did eat bread to the full. For ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

This circumstance clearly shews, that no human provision had been made for the march of such a number of people. The country they had to march through had not been explored, no stations had been fixed upon, and their provision entirely failed in a fortnight. How ill, then, must they have been prepared to march through the whole of that immense desert which lay between them and the land of Canaan, of which they were going to take possession. Indeed, every circumstance in this remarkable history evidently shews, that the plan of this deliverance from Egypt was laid not by man, but by God, who, by his own power, with *a high band*, as we read, *and an outstretched arm*, himself executed it in all its parts. No-
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thing was due to Moses, or to any other leader, and therefore he justly replied to the people when they murmured, *Exod. xvi. 18. What are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord.*

In this distress the people were relieved, *Exod. xvi. 13*, by the falling of a flight of quails, which covered the whole camp, that very evening; and the next morning they found, for the first time, all the country round them covered with a nourishing substance which they called *manna*, with which they were miraculously supplied ever after till they came to the borders of the land of Canaan. Though this manna could not usually be kept more than one day, it was remarkable, that when none of it fell on the sabbath day, but a double quantity the day before, it might be kept two days. Also a pot filled with it, and deposited in the ark, was kept to future generations. *Exod. xvi. 33.*

Proceeding farther, to Rephidim, the people murmured again for want of water, *Exod. xvii. 3*, and there God relieved them by a perpetual stream, which issued
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from a rock, on Moses striking it, by the command of God, with his rod. These difficulties, in which the people found themselves unexpectedly involved, did not lead them to disbelieve the power of God, but only to fear he had deserted them. This place Moses denominated Meribah, *Exod. xvii. 7, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they had tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?*

After this we have an account of a battle which the people had with the Amalekites in which Joshua commanded, while Moses only prayed for his success. From this it is evident that he was no warrior; and as other circumstances shew that he was not possessed of the wisdom and sagacity which are usually ascribed to him; and as he was of a most unambitious disposition, he appears to have been by no means naturally qualified to undertake the conducting of his countrymen in the hazardous enterprize of leaving Egypt, then inhabited by a powerful people, and dispossessing another war-like nation of a country in which they

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had strongly fortified themselves. What he did was not from any impulse of his own mind, but by supernatural direction and assistance.

The next transaction in the history, on which, for its singular importance, I shall dwell some time, took place in the third month after the Israelites had left Egypt (Exod. xiii. 1.) at Mount Sinai, where we find such evidences of the presence and power of God as had never been exhibited before, and which, in point of grandeur and magnificence, have never been equalled since; and the scene was so circumstanced, that there could not possibly have been any deception, or imposition, in the case. Hitherto the power of God had been abundantly displayed in great *events*. The successive plagues of Egypt, and the passage through the red sea, had been evidently effected by divine power; and the result had been such a deliverance of a completely-enslaved people, from the power of a wise and warlike nation, as no power or policy of their own could have effected, especially in so short a time, and in their circumstances.

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But every message, or order, had been delivered to the Israelites, or to Pharaoh, by Moses. The Divine Being had, in all the cases, spoken to *him* in the first instance, and he had delivered the message to them. But now every individual Israelite was to hear the voice of God himself.

Hitherto also the particular designs of Providence respecting this nation had not been distinctly announced, except in general terms to Abraham; and a promise of freedom from such plagues as those with which the Egyptians had been afflicted, if they would obey the voice of God, had been made to them at Elim. But now the great purpose of their deliverance from Egypt, and of every thing else that was to be done in favour of this nation, was to be clearly made known to them, and a regular *covenant* was to be established between God and them, the effect of which was to continue to the end of time. This purpose of the Divine Being is thus announced to Moses, *Exod. xix. 3.*

And Moses went up unto God, and the

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Lord

Lord called unto him out of the Mount, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel, Ye have seen all that I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people. For all the earth is mine; and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words ye shall speak unto the children of Israel.

In consequence of this Moses assembled the people, and delivered this important message; and, as we read, *Exod. xix. 8, all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the word of the people unto the Lord.*

The transaction having proceeded thus far, the solemn ratification of what God had declared was announced in the following manner. *Exod. xix. 9. And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak unto thee, and believe thee for ever.*

ever. They were themselves to hear the voice of God from the awful appearance of a thick cloud, in order that their faith in the divine mission of their law-giver, and consequently in all the promises of God made by him, might be confirmed beyond the danger of any future doubt. And the extraordinary measure has been attended with the desired effect, the whole Jewish nation having, from that time to the present, never entertained a doubt on the subject.

This extraordinary appearance of God speaking to a whole nation from a thick cloud on the top of Mount Sinai, was announced three days before it took place; and their attention was kept up to it by the most solemn preparation that can be imagined; so that if any deception had been intended, they might have been put upon their guard. *Exod. xix. 10. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to-day and to-morrow, for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai.* Directions were then given, that no

persons whatever, except Moses and Aaron, should ascend the Mount ; and lest any of the people should press too near, bounds were set to prevent them.

After this preparation the narrative proceeds as follows. *Exod. xix. 17. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the nether part of the Mount, and Mount Sinai was altogether in a smoke ; because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as in a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.* Here it may be observed, that though smoke might be made upon the mount by persons previously placed there by Moses, the mountain could not have been made to *quake*, or *shake*, by any human means. Besides, it would have been very easy for the people to have distinguished a *smoke*, made by fire, from the thick *cloud* which enveloped the whole mountain. It may, indeed, be thought suspicious, that the people should not be permitted to ascend the mount. But, certainly, there was the strictest propriety and decorum in not permitting the bulk of the
people

people to press too near the place of the divine presence; and this very circumstance must have rendered the miracle of an audible voice from the top of the mountain more indisputable; since those who heard it were removed to a greater distance.

And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. Exod. xix. 19. What Moses spake, or what God answered, we are not told. It was probably a solemn invocation on the part of Moses, and the answer, whatever it was, was heard by the whole people. These speeches would serve as a gradual preparation for the great scene that was to follow, and would thereby put it more in the power of any sceptical or inquisitive persons among them to discover the deception, if there had been any in the case.

After this God called Moses to the top of the mount, and gave him a farther charge about the behaviour of the people. He then went down, and took his place among them, and after this, in the hearing of all the people, and in a loud articulate

voice, God delivered the ten commandments, preceded by this solemn introduction, *I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* Exod. xx. 2.

The company who heard these words, and the ten commandments which followed them, was much greater than was necessary for ascertaining the fact of distinct articulation. For they must have been more than two millions, and these were not near the place from which the voice issued, so that if speaking trumpets had been then known, which no person will say is at all probable, it would have been impossible, by any natural means, to have produced such an effect; and though the mere sound of a human voice may be heard to a considerable distance, distinct articulation cannot be perceived very far. And besides this articulate voice, and the sound of a trumpet, there was thunder and lightning, and a cloud enveloping the whole mountain; and though thunder and lightning be a natural phænomenon, it was impossible to have foreseen that such an appearance

pearance would take place three days before hand ; and certainly any thing of this tremendous kind would have interrupted, and disconcerted, any persons who should have been placed on the mount for the purpose of speaking to the people from thence.

This appearance was so awful, that the people seem to have removed to a considerable distance from the mountain before they heard any articulate words. For we read, *Exod. xx. 18, And all the people saw the thunder and the lightning, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking ; and when the people saw it they removed, as they naturally would, and stood afar off.* They would probably keep retiring from the mountain during the delivery of the ten commandments, which was probably very slow, so as to take up a considerable time ; and this would make the distinct hearing of them much more difficult, and extraordinary.

With this clear manifestation of the divine presence and power the people were fully satisfied, and no doubt remained upon their minds. Thus impressed, they said
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unto Moses, Deut. v. 24, *Behold the Lord our God hath shewed us his great glory, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God talketh with man and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. Go thou near, and hear all the things which the Lord our God saith, and thou shalt speak unto us; whatever the Lord shall say unto thee, and we will hear, and do it.*

In consequence of this, we read, Exod. xx. 21, *The people stood afar off, and Moses only drew near to the thick darkness where God was; and from the communications made to him Moses digested the whole system of the Jewish religion and polity, which is detailed in his writings; and there was then a solemn acceptance of this system, and an express formal covenant between God and the people of Israel on the occasion, the account of which immediately follows.*

Exod. xxiv. 3. *And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments; and all the people answered*
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with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said we will do. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning; and built an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings, of oxen, unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar, and he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people, and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words.

After this solemn transaction, Moses was again called up to the mount, and he continued there forty days, in order to receive the particulars of the future constitution, and two tables of stone, containing the ten commandments. While he continued there, a cloud covered the mount, *Exod. xxiv.*

15. And this cloud, called the *glory of God*, which assumed the appearance of darkness by day, and of fire by night (an appearance which no human art could counterfeit) covered the mount six whole days; and on the seventh day God called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud, when we read, *Exod. xxiv. 17, And the sight of the glory of God was like devouring fire on the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel, and Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount; and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights; and when God had made an end of communing with Moses, he gave him two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God. Exod. xxxi. 18.*

Thus ended this great transaction, the most important to the Israelitish nation, and eventually to the whole world, that ever was recorded. Such was the origin of that system out of which sprung Christianity as a necessary consequence, and a part, and which we Christians, therefore, are equally concerned to maintain, with the Jews themselves. The foundation of our
faith

faith in this system rests on the miraculous events which have been recited, and their credibility must be estimated by the circumstances of them, and especially by their effects.

From the circumstances it appears that nothing could have been devised to render these extraordinary facts less liable to objection; and their effects could not have been greater than they were, in securing the firm belief of them in the Jewish nation in every period of their history, even in the times of their greatest delinquency; and what is more, in recovering them from frequent relapses into idolatry, to which they were exceedingly prone, but which never implied any disbelief of the great facts on which the truth of their own religion was founded; and which has settled in as firm a faith as is now to be found in any part of the world, though at the distance of six thousand years from their date; and this notwithstanding the most discouraging situation possible, the most trying to men's faith and perseverance. For such is the faith of the Jews in the divine mission of Moses, believing in all the promises

ceed to direct your attention to those which immediately preceded, and accompanied, the taking possession of the land of Canaan, as being a part, and a continuation, of the same scheme. Of the remaining events in the life-time of Moses, some indeed were miraculous, but either not being very conspicuously so, or having only a temporary effect, I do not dwell upon them.

I must, however, except one miracle of a peculiar kind, by means of which the priesthood was settled in the family of Aaron, so that there was never afterwards any complaint on this subject. After the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, which respected Aaron as well as Moses, all the congregation complained, as if they had been the cause of the death of so many of the people; when God was pleased to punish them by a pestilence, of which fourteen thousand and seven hundred died, and a stop was put to it by Aaron taking incense, and standing between the dead and the living.

This action, in which Aaron was the instrument, having so instantaneous an effect,

fect, sufficiently distinguished him as a priest. But in order to put the matter beyond all possibility of doubt in future, God ordered that the heads of every tribe should deliver to Moses a rod, with their names written upon them; and that on the rod for the tribe of Levi the name of Aaron should be inscribed. These rods were laid before the ark, with an assurance from God, that the rod belonging to that tribe for whom the priesthood was destined should be found in blossom on the day following. Num. xvii. 5. As every tribe was interested in this decision, we cannot doubt but that sufficient precautions were taken that there should be no imposition in the case, though the particulars are not mentioned. The issue is thus recorded: *And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold the rod of Aaron, for the house of Levi, was budded, and brought forth buds, and blossomed blossoms, and yielded almonds. And Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord, unto all the children of Israel, and they looked, and took every man his rod.*

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And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me.

That there was any trick, or contrivance of Moses, in this case, is improbable on this account, that it was not himself, or his posterity, but Aaron, and his family, that was, in consequence of it, honoured with the priesthood. The children and posterity of Moses ranked no higher than other Levites, without any mark of distinction, or any advantage whatever; and he must have been a man different from all other men, if he had preferred the descendants even of his brother to his own. The sons of Moses are particularly mentioned, as well as those of Aaron; but we are informed of nothing concerning them, besides their names.

The remaining events in the life-time of Moses I shall barely mention. During the forty years that the Israelites abode in the wilderness, it is too probable that they continued in the neighbourhood of the stream which first issued from the rock of Rephidim, so that they were sufficiently supplied

plied with water. On their removing northwards to Kadesh, the southern border of the land of Canaan, the people were again distressed for want of water, when they were relieved a second time by a stream from a rock; and on this occasion it was that the improper conduct of Moses and Aaron was the cause of their not being permitted to go over the river Jordan.

The country of the Edomites lying in their way, they asked leave, but were refused, to pass peaceably through it. They therefore made the whole circuit of their country, and came to the southern border of the Amorites, on the other side of Jordan. But before this, having been attacked by Arad, one of the princes of the southern parts of Canaan, they vowed the destruction of his cities; and this was afterwards accomplished by Joshua. After this Aaron died, and was buried in Mount Hor, and was succeeded in the office of high priest by his son Eleazar.

In this going round all the land of Edom, the people being much distressed, murmured once more, and they were punished

for it by fiery serpents, but they were relieved, when, by the particular order of God, they only looked towards a brazen serpent, which had been erected on a pole for that purpose. Thus the hand of God was conspicuous in their relief from this calamity, as well as on every other occasion.

The Israelites being now come to the borders of the Amorites, to the east of the river Jordan, they asked leave to pass peaceably through it; but being refused, and opposed by force, they defeated them, and took possession of their country. After this Og king of Bashan coming in an hostile manner against them, they defeated him also, and taking possession of his country, they became masters of a very large and fertile tract on the other side of Jordan, bordering on the Moabites and Ammonites, the descendants of Lot.

Here Balak king of Moab, being jealous of the Israelites, but not choosing to meet them in battle, hired Balaam a prophet to pronounce a curse upon them, thinking that this would ensure their destruction.

But

But instead of this God was pleased to compel him to pronounce a blessing.

In this transaction the Midianites joined the Moabites; and the Israelites, continuing some time in their neighbourhood, were tempted to join in one of their religious festivals, in which, as in various acts of the heathen religion, the people indulged themselves in the promiscuous commerce of the sexes. But by the zeal of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, a stop was put to this evil. For this insidious attempt of the Midianites to draw the Israelites into idolatry, war was ordered to be made upon them; the consequence of which was the total defeat of the Midianites, and the plundering, but not the taking possession, of their country. In this battle Balaam the prophet also fell, and by the judgment of God every person concerned in any acts of idolatry along with the Midianites, which was the worship of Baal Peor, died before they came to the land of Canaan. This Moses particularly observed to them. Deut. iv. 3. *Your eyes have seen what the Lord did because of Baal*

Peor. For all the men that followed Baal Peor, the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you; but ye who did cleave to the Lord your God are alive, every one of you, this day.

In the last years of the life of Moses he wrote the book of Deuteronomy, consisting of a recapitulation of the great events which have been recited, the most earnest exhortations to the people to continue firm in their allegiance to the true God, foretelling their prosperity in case of obedience, and the dreadful calamities that would overtake them (and they have all actually come to pass) in case of their disobedience; and lastly in encouraging Joshua, who succeeded him in the general conduct of the people. After this, not being permitted to pass the river Jordan, he was indulged with a sight of the promised land from Mount Pisgah; and there, though in full vigour, he died, or was thought so to do. But to me it seems not improbable, that, as he appeared together with Elijah, who was translated into heaven without dying, on the mountain on which our Saviour was transfigured,

transfigured, he had been translated also; and is now living together with them. But where they are, or how they are employed, is, no doubt for good reasons, unknown to us.

Moses being dead, or translated, Joshua was appointed to succeed him. That this was by divine appointment is probable, because it does not appear that Joshua had any natural interest that could have recommended him to so important a succession. He was neither of the same tribe with Moses and Aaron, nor of that of Judah, to which, by the prophecy of Jacob, the pre-eminence was promised. Had Moses himself had any choice in the case, and he had had the spirit of enterprize and ambition that unbelievers must ascribe to him, it would, no doubt, have been in favour of his own family, or at least of his own tribe.

We are now to attend to the miraculous interpositions of Divine Providence in the conduct of the Israelites under Joshua, till their complete settlement in the land of Canaan. And these were sufficiently re-

markable, and such as must have convinced the Israelites that nothing of any consequence depended upon, or had been done by, Moses; but that it was the power of God that had been displayed by him, and which was the same at all times.

The effect of the miracles which had been performed while the Israelites were under the conduct of Moses, upon the inhabitants of Canaan, appeared when Joshua sent spies to discover the situation of the country which he was about to invade. For the woman who received these spies said, Josh. ii. 9. *I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us; and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up all the waters of the red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did to the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man because of you. For the Lord your God, he is God*
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in heaven above, and in earth beneath. The extraordinary events here referred to respected other nations, and were necessarily known to them, but not the transactions at Mount Sinai, or the other events on which I have descanted, which were confined to the Israelites themselves, and which were particularly calculated to confirm their faith in the divine mission of Moses, and in the truth and importance of the civil and religious institutions which he communicated to them.

The passage of the Israelites over the river Jordan was as remarkable a transaction as their passage through the red sea, and with respect to its credibility, is as little liable to objection. For no natural cause could have made the waters of a river divide, as these did, so as to make a passage for such a number of people, and so long a space of time, and especially when it overflowed its banks as it did, and still does, in the time of harvest, when the Israelites had occasion to cross it. Besides this most wonderful event was announced three days before hand, as the miracle at Mount Sinai had

had likewise been, and it was attended with such other peculiar circumstances, as abundantly demonstrates that human power, or contrivance, had nothing to do in the case. It will be interesting and instructive to attend to these particulars.

After Joshua had received his instructions from God, he announced the wonderful event in the following manner. Josh. i. 11. *Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, command the people, saying, Prepare your victuals. For within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you, to possess it.* This order being executed on the day before the event, *Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves, for to-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you.* And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, *Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people.*

Things being in this state of readiness, we are informed that *the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all-Israel, that they may know that,*

that, as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee. After this Joshua, by divine direction, gave the following very particular orders, announcing every thing that was to take place; and the circumstances and the manner in which every thing was done shews that there could not have been any thing like human contrivance in the case. A great river was to be crossed, and yet no boats, or bridge, were provided for the purpose. What Joshua said was as follows:

Josh. iii. 9. And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Gergashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes before you into Jordan. Now therefore take ye twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall

shall rest on the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above, and they shall stand upon an heap. What perfect confidence does this language shew in the power of God, and the truth of the divine promise? The narrative then proceeds, and we find that every circumstance answered to the prediction.

And it came to pass when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; and as they that bare the ark came into Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water (for Jordan overfloweth all its banks all the time of harvest) that the waters which came down from above stood, and rose up upon a heap, very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan, and those that came down towards the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed and were cut off, and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites

raelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.

Such was this extraordinary transaction, of which all the people were, of course, witnesses. But besides this, measures were immediately taken to preserve the memory of it to future ages. Twelve stones were taken out of the bed of the river, near the place where the priests had stood during the passing of the people, and were erected on the neighbouring shore.

Of these particulars we have the following narrative. Jos. iv. 1. “ *And it came to pass when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command you them, saying; Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests feet stood firm, twelve stones, and you shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place where you shall lodge this night. This Joshua did, saying, v. 5. That this may be a sign among you, that when your children shall ask your fathers in time to come, saying, What mean you*

you by these stones, then shall ye answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, when it passed over Jordan, that the waters of Jordan were cut off, and these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel for ever.

We then read that the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones, out of the midst of Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in (or perhaps rather out of) the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests that bare the ark of the covenant stood, and they are there unto this day. For the priests who bare the ark of the covenant stood in the midst of Jordan, till every thing was finished which the Lord commanded Joshua, and the people hastened and passed over.

This interesting narrative closes in the following manner: And it came to pass that when all the people were clean passed over,

over, that the ark of the Lord passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people: And it came to pass that when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests feet were lifted up, unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned into their place, and flowed over all its banks, as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, on the east border of Jericho. And these twelve stones which they took out of Jordan did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers, in time to come, saying, What mean these stones, then shall ye let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord God dried up the waters of Jordan before you until you were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea which he dried up before us, until we were gone over; that all the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.

You see how naturally, and circumstantially, this wonderful event is related, which could only be done by an eye witness; and this is the farthest in the world from being a *traditional* account, such as had passed through many hands before it came to the writer; and the witnesses of the transaction were more than two millions of persons.

The effect of this great event on the inhabitants of Canaan was such as might have been expected; as we find, Josh. v. *And it came to pass when all the kings of the Amorites which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until they were passed over, that their heart melted; neither was there spirit in them any more because of the children of Israel.*

During this consternation of their enemies, the Israelites were directed to do what would certainly have been deemed the extreme of madness in any other circumstances, and which tried their faith in

the protection of God to the utmost. Having neglected the rite of circumcision during their sojourning in the wilderness, they were, by the express order of God, all circumcised immediately after they had passed the river, and were arrived in the country of their enemies, at whose mercy they thereby evidently were, if they had ventured to attack them; and this they naturally would have done to prevent their passing the river, had it been made by any natural means. Their conduct, therefore, may be considered as a proof that it was effected in a supernatural manner. The following is the scriptural account of this circumstance.

Josh. v. 2. At that time the Lord said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel, the second time. And it came to pass when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their place in the camp till they were whole.

To commemorate this transaction, the place was called *Gilgal*, which signifies a *rolling away*, because, as it is said, God
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there rolled away the reproach of Egypt from the people of Israel. Josh. v. 9.

At this time also, instead of pursuing their advantage they had, in the consternation of their enemies, as invaders naturally would have done, on the fourteenth day of the month, which was four days after the passage of the river, the Israelites had a solemn celebration of the passover. *And on the morrow after the passover, we read, that they ate of the old corn of the land, and then the miraculous supply of manna wholly ceased. Josh. v. 12. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land, neither did the children eat manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.* This was the beginning of harvest, and they would, of course, reap the fields in the neighbourhood of the camp; and before this they had not found sufficient to supply so great a number as the nation of the Israelites now consisted of.

After these signal and numerous proofs of the presence of God with the Israelites,
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We may wonder at the obstinacy of the inhabitants of Canaan, in making any opposition to them. But they were surprised that they were to be wholly exterminated, and that submission would avail them nothing: There were instances also of the Israelites having sustained some loss and defeat, as in their encounters with the Amalekites and king Arad, and therefore they could not tell but that circumstances might again arise, in which they might combat them with success: They did not, however, immediately advance against the Israelites, as the Amalekites and Arad had done; and as they naturally would have done, if they had not been overawed by the miraculous passage of the river, which (as they might learn that the Israelites had provided no boats or bridges) they might think a sufficient bar to their farther progress. But the inhabitants of the first considerable city that lay in their way, viz. Jericho, contented themselves with keeping within their walls, which their enemies did not appear to have any means of assailing.

It pleased God, however, to make a signal display of his power, in reducing this strongly fortified place, without the aid of any human means whatever, and in a manner peculiarly striking and terrific. After the appearance of an angel, who called himself *the captain of the host of the Lord*, to Joshua, *the Lord said unto him, See I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour*; and the manner in which this was to be effected, so that the Divine Power should be as conspicuous as it had been in the destruction of the army of Pharaoh, was thus announced to him. Josh. vi. 3. *Ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shall ye do six days. And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams horns; and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass that when they make a long blast with the rams horns, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city shall fall down*

down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

What must the people of Jericho have thought during this solemn procession, especially after its continuing so long a time. All this was transacted with the greatest punctuality; and to render the effect more striking, *Joshua commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice; neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day that I bid you shout. Then shall ye shout.* Accordingly, when the proper time was come, he said to the people, *Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city.* During this shout the wall of the city fell, and, as they had been directed, every man went up straight before him; and agreeably to the positive orders they had received on this particular occasion, and which was never after repeated, they destroyed every thing they found in the place, sparing only Rahab and her relations. They also *burned the city with fire, and all that was therein; only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the trea-*

jury of the house of the Lord. They were strictly forbidden to appropriate any thing to their own use, which shews that they were not actuated by the passions of other conquerors. And as they did not indulge their natural disposition of *avarice*, we may well suppose they did not indulge that of *cruelty*, but considered themselves as the mere executioners of the orders of heaven.

Notwithstanding the positive order to destroy every living thing in Jericho, making the first fruits of their conquests a kind of whole burned offering to God, who gave it to them, one person was tempted to transgress this order, by taking, and hiding, some part of the spoil. For this the people suffered a partial defeat in their next attempt, which was upon a town called Ai. But the offender was discovered by a solemn lot, conducted under the immediate direction of God; and, as an example of disobedience, he was publicly stoned to death.

This example would operate to deter any more of the people from disobeying any other divine command. And the conquest
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of a city so fortified as Jericho was, and effected in the extraordinary manner that has been related, could not but strike a terror into all the inhabitants of the country, and impress them with the idea of the superiority of the God of Israel to their own divinities; though they had worshipped them in the most expensive manner, sacrificing to them not only human victims in general, but frequently even their own children.

I have no occasion to recite any farther particulars of the conquest of Canaan. These events, of which the whole nation of the Israelites were witnesses, and the history of which was committed to writing at the time, must have convinced them that they were under the direction of the God of nature and of the universe; and the well known effect of this conviction upon that nation, little disposed as they were to believe any thing of the kind, viz. so unfavourable to that propensity to idolatry which affected them no less than all other antient nations, is sufficient to satisfy any person of reflection,

tion, and who attends to the principles of human nature, of the certainty of these events, which imply an actual interposition of Divine Providence in favour of the Israelitish nation, and furnish a proof of the truth of that system of revelation, which commenced with the institutions of Moses, and was completed by the mission of Jesus Christ.

Such a firm persuasion in the whole Jewish nation, circumstanced as they are well known to have been, on the supposition that the events above recited never took place, and that the written history of them is not authentic, would be a miracle of a much more extraordinary nature than any of those that are objected to, and a miracle without any reasonable object. For what rational end could have been answered by such a supernatural infatuation (for it could not have been any thing less) as should induce a whole nation firmly to believe all the particulars that I have recited, viz. the account of all the plagues of Egypt, their passing through the red sea
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and the river Jordan, the Divine Being speaking to them from Mount Sinai, and this last instance of the miraculous fall of the walls of Jericho, without any human means, and that the books containing the history of these particulars were written and published while the memory of the things recorded in them was recent; when, if the account had been fabulous, it must have been exceedingly easy to have exposed it.

No nation in the world, not even the most credulous, (and the Jews have always been the least so) could have been imposed upon in so gross a manner. And this was not in one particular, but in many; and those on the largest scale, the farthest in the world from resembling tricks of legerdemain, such as may be exhibited before a few persons in a private room. But, for the satisfaction of all mankind in future ages, it was requisite that those miracles, which ushered in the first dispensation of revealed religion, should be so circumstanced with respect both to number and magnitude, as to

be out of the reach of all reasonable objection, though not of mere cavil ;! and such is actually the case. We may even venture to say that, had the most sceptical person in the world been asked, what he himself would wished to have been done, in order to satisfy him that the author of Nature had really interposed in the government of the world, he could not have pitched upon more striking things, as an evidence of it, than the ten plagues of Egypt, the passage of the red sea and the river Jordan, the articulate and audible voice from Mount Sinai, pronouncing not a few words only (for in that the hearing might be deceived) but so many as composed the ten commandments, and lastly the falling of the walls of Jericho, all of them exhibited in the presence of a whole nation, and some of them even more nations than one.

In order to satisfy distant ages, that such things as these really took place, what more could have been demanded, than that the history of them should be committed to writing while the facts were recent, that
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solemn customs should be instituted at the very time for the purpose of commemorating them; that a nation the least disposed to the religion which all this apparatus was provided to establish, should receive the history as genuine, and reluctantly adopt the religion thus enjoined them; and that notwithstanding their many deviations from it, owing to the seductive nature of the rites of other nations, they should, by their faith in this history, be brought back to the strict observance of it, and continue in it to this day, a period of about four thousand years.

Nothing but a due attention to this remarkable state of things is necessary to ensure the firm belief of the whole to the most sceptical of mankind. And in due time we cannot doubt but that this due attention will be given to this history, and to that of the propagation of Christianity in conjunction with it; and then all mankind will of course become worshippers of the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and of Jesus Christ; and this
faith

faith cannot but be attended with a great improvement in the moral conduct of men, such as will ensure to them the truest enjoyment of this life, and immortal happiness in the life to come.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE VI.

General Observations on the Evidence
of the divine Mission of Moses.

Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth; and ask from the one side of heaven to the other, whether there have been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it.

DEUT. iv. 32.

HAVING considered pretty largely the miracles which accompanied the deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, and their settlement in the land of Canaan, I shall now, in order to diversify these discourses, make some observations of a more general nature, relating to the evidences of both the Jewish and the Christian revelations, and also some particulars respecting Moses himself.

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In the first place I would observe that the proper ground of our faith in the two revelations, by Moses and by Christ, is the evidence of the miraculous events which were exhibited on two peculiarly great occasions, and that much of the credibility of many of the subsequent miracles, as those which occur in the history of the prophets of the Old Testament, and of the Apostles in the New, is derived from them. In any new circumstances of things, they are the *first* extraordinary events that require a peculiarly strong evidence, a degree of evidence proportioned to their extraordinary nature, that is, their want of analogy to preceding events; and such will be found to have accompanied the miracles of Moses and of Christ, especially that of his resurrection. But these facts being once admitted, a new analogy of facts is established, in consequence of which events similar to them, as belonging to the same system, will naturally be admitted on less circumstantial evidence. If, for example, we had ourselves seen any person do what was deemed extraordinary, or more than could have

have been expected of persons in his situation, we should examine the facts with the greatest-rigour. But after being satisfied with respect to their evidence, we should not require so much for a repetition of the same things, as the performance of others similar to them, either by himself, or by persons connected with him.

If therefore any person be satisfied that the miracles exhibited at the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, at Mount Sinai, and at their settlement in the land of Canaan, be credible, he will have little difficulty in admitting the truth of other miracles, which occur in the course of the same history, though, separately taken, the evidence of them should appear to be less satisfactory. The same will be the case with respect to the miracles ascribed to Peter and Paul, after admitting those of Christ; because they would be such as would be naturally expected to follow them.

Nay, the easy admission of such miracles on slight evidence is a kind of proof that the evidence of the preceding miracles had
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been satisfactory. For nothing else could have prepared the minds of men for the easy reception of the subsequent ones. Thus the credulity of Christians after the age of the Apostles, and the many pretended miracles of a later period, which were received without sufficient examination, prove that the minds of men had been predisposed for their easy reception; and this could not have been done without satisfactory evidence of preceding miracles of a similar nature.

In this view the ready reception of Mahometanism itself proves that the minds of men in that part of the world had been prepared for it, by having had satisfactory evidence of some preceding revelations. Otherwise they would have rejected his pretensions, as most preposterous and absurd. The credulity of mankind with respect to him, and other impostors, Christians or others, is no proof of the truth of *their* pretensions, but a strong presumption that those of some others, who had preceded them, had been better founded.

In order, therefore, to examine the foundation

dation of any system of religion, we should attend principally to the *original miracles*, from which the credibility of all those that followed was derived, and in this view those of Moses have the preference of those of Christ; since the miracles of Christ must have appeared more credible in proportion to the credibility of those of a similar preceding dispensation, which he himself received. For a Jew, who, as such, believed the divine mission of Moses, would much more easily admit that of Christ, than a heathen, who had no previous faith in the divine mission of any person whatever. And for this reason, no doubt, it was provided, in the course of Divine Providence, that the Christian religion should be promulgated by means of a series of miracles wholly unaided by those by which the Jewish religion was established, and more open to the examination of the whole world, which it respected. And, as I propose to shew in some future Discourse, the miracles of Christ, being exhibited in a more inquisitive age, and having been subjected to a peculiarly rigorous

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test, which would ensure it the examination of both friends and enemies, Christianity has advantages with respect to its credibility peculiar to itself, and even superior, in some respects, to that of the miracles of Moses. Let us, however, give the closest attention to both, whether we consider them as connected with each other, or not.

I cannot proceed any farther without noticing the extreme absurdity of maintaining what some have done, viz. that the miracles of Christ may be admitted, and those of Moses rejected, as if Judaism and Christianity had no necessary connection; whereas they are, in fact, parts of the same scheme, and imply the truth of each other; or, though the former may not distinctly point to the latter, the latter is evidently built upon the former.

Christ and the Apostles were Jews, and entertained no doubt whatever of the truth of the religion in which they were educated. And can it be supposed that they should have a divine mission themselves, and at the same time be believers in what was a mere imposture, and imagine that

what they received from God was built upon that imposture? Such an alliance between truth and falsehood is absolutely incredible. Those who have entertained this strange idea must have given much less attention to the evidence of the divine mission of Moses than to that of those miracles which prove that of Christ's, or they would not have thought so meanly of it.

If Christianity has advantages peculiar to itself, with respect to the evidence of its truth, Judaism has others peculiar to itself, and no less striking, especially those of an internal nature. For if we consider the state of the world in the time of Moses, it must appear in the highest degree incredible, that he should have attained ideas concerning God, and a Providence, so infinitely superior to those that were to be found in any of the neighbouring nations, even the most learned and polished. Where could he have learned the truly sublime and rational idea of one God, and the purity of his worship, when all other nations were addicted to idolatry, and the most

horrid vices in the worship of their several deities? How came the Jewish religion to have nothing in it of omens, auguries, charms, and numberless such superstitious observances as those of which the whole of the religion of the Heathens (not excepting that of the Greeks and Romans) consisted? How came the Jewish religion to come in aid of the purest morality, when that of all their neighbours encouraged alike the grossest sensuality and cruelty? Among them we find the most shocking indecencies committed in the very temples, and among all of them we find human sacrifices. And these were things of which the Jewish lawgiver expressed the greatest abhorrence; and in all other respects the Jews were certainly not more enlightened, or more civilized, than their neighbours. This great difference cannot be accounted for but by supposing that the Jews were *taught of God*, while other nations had been left to their *vain imaginations*; fancying that their affairs were subject to the influence of the sun, moon, and stars, and other imaginary causes of good and evil,
and

and having recourse to the most ridiculous rites in order to avert the indignation, and conciliate the favour, of those imaginary powers.

With respect to the immediate effect of the miracles of Moses and those of Christ, it is to be observed that the former gained the entire and firm assent of the whole nation of the Israelites, whereas the latter convinced only a part of them. But in the former case there was no previous principle of unbelief operating to counteract their effect. It was nothing but the hopeless state of their affairs that made the Israelites distrust the divine mission of Moses, the first object of which was their deliverance from their bondage in Egypt; but when this was actually effected, in the manner that Moses predicted, and entirely without their concurrence, nothing remained but a joyful acquiescence in what they themselves saw, and could not but see, that God had done for them.

On the other hand, Jesus found the whole nation of the Jews possessed of a firm belief in a temporal deliverer, and

the firmest persuasion concerning the truth of their prophecies. It is not much to be wondered at therefore that they could not be made to believe, even on the evidence of miracles, that any other than a king could be their promised Messiah ; so that their faith in Moses and their other prophets operated to prevent their receiving Jesus in the same character. Their worldly ambition also would tend to confirm them in their prejudices against the pretensions of Jesus.

However the purposes of God were equally answered by the universal belief of the Jews in the divine mission of Moses, and their partial belief in that of Jesus. In the former case it was necessary that the whole nation should form itself into a peculiar system of government, of which God himself was to be the head ; and this could not have been effected without the concurrence of the nation, and consequently without their being satisfied with respect to the authority which enjoined that system. But the object of Christianity was not national, having no more respect to the
Jews

Jews than to other people, and therefore it required of the Jews of that age only such a persuasion of the truth of the facts, especially that of the resurrection of Jesus, as should ensure the general and universal belief of it in future ages, and to the end of the world. And this object could not, as I shall shew, have been attained, if the great body of the Jewish nation, and especially the governing persons in it, had immediately become Christians.

The Jewish and Christian dispensations were similar to each other with respect to the test that their evidences were put to, in consequence of the opposition that was made to them. No facts, as I shall shew, were ever subjected to so rigorous a scrutiny as those on which the divine mission of Jesus rested, by means of the umbrage that was taken at it by all the powers of the world, in the age in which it was promulgated, and the consequent persecution of his followers. The divine mission and authority of Moses were also tried in a very rigorous manner by the opposition that was made to him, and nothing could have overcome that

opposition but the most overbearing evidence that God was with him.

Moses having tarried on Mount Sinai forty days, when the people had no expectation of any such thing, and they knew that he had no sustenance, concluded (and not very unnaturally) that they should see no more of him. *Exod. xxxii. 1, &c. And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, they gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us Gods, that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.* They had no doubt of the reality of what they had seen in proof of their having been hitherto conducted by God and Moses, but they hastily concluded, as they had done before, that they were deserted, and therefore thought that they must do the best they could for themselves. And having no system of worship as yet established, and thinking, with all other people, that nothing was to be done without one, they reverted to such rites as they had been used to, but still in honour, as they

they thought, of their own God. For when Aaron complied with their wishes, and made the golden calf, in direct violation, no doubt, of the second commandment (but which had not then been committed to writing, or particularly explained to them) he made proclamation, and said, *To-morrow is a feast to Jehovah.*

No sooner, however, did Moses make his appearance than the whole business ceased, and by his order the Levites alone went through the camp, and, without meeting with any opposition, made an indiscriminate slaughter of three thousand men. Could this have taken place by the order of a single man, if the people had not had the fullest persuasion from what had passed that he was commissioned by God, and that all resistance would have been vain?

On this occasion Moses had an opportunity of shewing his unambitious nature, and the piety and generosity of his sentiments. For when, in order to try him, God proposed to destroy the Israelites, and to make of him a great nation, *Exod.*

xxxii. 10. he interceded for the people in the following truly noble manner. *And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said unto the Lord, Why does thy wrath wax hot against thy people, whom thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt, with great power and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce anger, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.* Thus ended this remarkable transaction, disgraceful, indeed, to the Israelites, but highly favourable to the evidence of the divine mission of Moses, and the truth of their religion.

If there had been any *secret* in the miracles of Moses, it must have been known to Aaron, who was always employed as
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the instrument of them, by waving his rod, as the signal when they were to take place; and this secret would probably have been discovered when he and their sister Miriam complained of the superiority which he assumed over them, though he was the younger brother, and had married a stranger; which in their opinion degraded him. Numb. xii. 1. *And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses, because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married. And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses, and hath he not spoken also by us?* This discontent, however, implied no doubt of the divine interposition in favour of the nation, but only a dissatisfaction at the pre-eminence of Moses, as the chief instrument of it. However, notwithstanding the disadvantage of Moses in the respects above mentioned, and his own unambitious nature, the contest was soon decided in his favour by the interposition of God himself, and both Aaron and all the people were satisfied.

At the report of the spies who were sent to explore the land of Canaan, all the people

ple were disheartened, and ready to go back to Egypt. But Moses, so far from doing any thing to sooth and pacify them, assured them that, on account of this distrust of the power and promise of God, they would be detained forty years in the wilderness, and that not one of them who had murmured would be permitted to see the promised land. This reproach instigated them to make a rash attempt to enter the country, but when that proved unsuccessful, as Moses had foretold, they were far from executing their purpose of returning into Egypt; and being fully satisfied with respect to the divine power that accompanied Moses, and which had conducted them hitherto, they submitted to this hard sentence, obeyed his orders as before, and continued to live a wandering life in the wilderness the whole of the forty years, without making any more attempts, either to return to Egypt, or to invade Canaan prematurely. What greater proof can be required of this refractory people being convinced that God was with Moses, and that by him he conducted them?

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The rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, by far the most formidable that Moses ever encountered, implied no dissatisfaction with respect to their being guided by the hand of God, but only with the pre-eminence of Moses and Aaron. For we read, Num. xvi. 3. *And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Wherefore then lift ye yourselves up above the congregation of the Lord?* This rebellion, however, was soon terminated in the most awful manner, the earth opening and swallowing up these complainers with every thing belonging to them, as was previously announced by Moses, and we hear no more complaints of the kind. The measure may appear harsh, but it was necessary that the authority of Moses should be thoroughly established.

It is not necessary for me to vindicate the conduct of God with respect to the Israelites, or to the world at large, though I shall hereafter make some observations on
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this subject; my principal object in this Discourse being to illustrate the proof of his actual interposition. And certainly there cannot be any clearer evidence of it than the opening of the earth at the word of a man.

But we may be satisfied that whatever the author of Nature does, it will appear to be ultimately right, however it may appear to us at present. It is in the hand of the same Being who conducted the Israelites that we ourselves, and all our concerns, necessarily are. It is, therefore, our business to accommodate ourselves to his will, and acquiesce in his proceedings, unless we think that we can better our condition by complaining.

Among other internal evidences of the fidelity and truth of the Mosaic history, is the excellent character, which, from an attention to the narrative only, we cannot help forming of Moses. That encomium upon him, Num. xii. 3. *Now the man Moses was very meek above all the men that were on the face of the earth*, was evidently the remark of some other person, afterwards

wards inserted in the text ; having no proper connexion with any thing that goes before, or that follows it. But we every where see the greatest piety, the strongest affection for the people at the head of whom he was unwillingly placed, and whose perverseness was almost intolerable, and what is more, as simple an account of his own failings, as of those of the people, without any attempt to palliate them.

Of this we have a most remarkable instance in his impatience, to say the least, in striking the rock at the second time of producing water in this way, and in his acquiescence in the punishment of his offence, which was nothing less than his not being permitted to see his countrymen settled in the promised land, though it is evident from his earnest prayer afterwards, that it was the first wish of his heart so to do.

From what conceivable motive could an impostor have invented such a story as this? Also if the people had been at his disposal, what reason could he have had for detaining them so long in the wilderness? With the
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greatest ease they had taken possession of all the country to the west of the river Jordan ; and to all appearance they were as well prepared to pass the river immediately after, while the terror of their arms was fresh in the minds of the people of Canaan, as at any time afterwards ; and Moses, though in years, was in his full vigour. Nay, to all appearance, the people were as well prepared for this important expedition presently after their departure from Egypt, and especially after their passage of the red sea, as at any time afterwards ; and the history of their attempt at Kadesh shews that they had as much spirit for the enterprize. But their impetuosity was restrained till, according to all natural probability, their spirits would be broken, they would have acquired the tame life of the wandering Arabs, and have been utterly unable to contend with a people who lived in fenced cities, and who, being apprized of the enterprize, would have had abundant time for taking their measures to repel the invasion. Desirous as the people, and, no doubt, Moses himself must have

have been, to take possession of the country for the sake of which they had left Egypt, what could have restrained them so long, but the best grounded persuasion of a divine command for that purpose. Admitting this, the whole history is perfectly natural, and certainly most instructive; but on any other supposition the most unnatural that ever was written.

To an attentive reader there needs no other evidence of the authenticity of the books of Moses than the manner in which they are written, especially his most earnest and affectionate address to the people before his death, contained in the book of Deuteronomy, in which he constantly appeals to the people with respect to what themselves had seen and heard, and makes the most natural observations upon it. I should think it barely possible for any person to read only that book through with attention, and remain an unbeliever in the great events alluded to in it, and related more at length in the preceding books. There is no where extant, since the art of writing was known, and since the art

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has been most improved, a mode of address more expressive of genuine and excellent sentiments than what we find in this, the oldest of all writers. With this view, and for the sake of the valuable instruction which it affords, I shall subjoin to this Discourse a considerable part of the fourth Chapter, and also some other passages relating to the blessings which would attend their obedience, and the curses which would follow their disobedience.

Before I close this subject, it may not be improper to make an observation or two on the conduct of the Divine Being in these transactions, in order to give what satisfaction I may be able to those who find a difficulty with respect to the propriety and justice of some parts of it.

We are told in our translation, that the Israelites were directed by God himself to borrow of the Egyptians vessels of silver, vessels of gold, and other valuable things, before their departure, when there was no design to restore the things borrowed; and therefore that he authorized a fraudu-

lent transaction. But in the original it is simply they *asked*, or perhaps *demand*ed, of the Egyptians the things that they took, which does not imply any intention of returning them; and if the quantity and value were very great, as they probably were, the Egyptians could not be easily made to believe that they wanted them all for the purpose of sacrificing, which was the original pretence for asking leave to go out of the country. In the terror the Egyptians were now in, fearing, as we read, *lest they should all be dead men*, they seem to have wished to get rid of them at any rate, and to have been willing to give them any thing that they demanded as a present at their departure, which, it is to be observed, is agreeable to the oriental customs. And certainly after, at least, a hundred years of hard servitude, it cannot be supposed that they got in this way more than they were fairly entitled to; so that there was no real injustice in the case, and there is no objection except in the manner in which they took what really belonged to them.

Again, it is said to be unreasonable for God to harden the heart of Pharaoh, as he is said to have done, in order to give occasion for the extraordinary displays of miracles of which I have given an account. He is even said to have raised him up for this very purpose. But this is nothing more than the usual phraseology of scripture, according to which every thing is immediately ascribed to God that takes place in the general plan of Providence, of which he is, in a proper sense, indeed, but only ultimately, the author.

Thus, when David heard Shimei curse him, he said, *Let him curse, for God has bidden him curse.* Not that Shimei had received any order from God to curse David, or that David thought so when he made use of the language; but that it was righteous in God to permit him so to do. So also Joseph said that *God had sent him into Egypt*, when he well knew that he was sent thither by the wicked devices of his brethren. But his going thither was an event of which Providence, as it were, availed itself, for the best of purposes.

The same was the case with respect to Pharaoh. He was naturally, as we say, an obstinate man, and long persisted in his resolution to detain the Israelites in subjection to him; and the Divine Being made use of this disposition of his to give such a manifest display of his power, as answered the most important purposes in that age, and to the present time. And we have instances in history, and in common life, of obstinacy equal to that of Pharaoh. That of the Scribes and Pharisees in our Saviour's time was not short of it, and equally subservient to the designs of Providence.

That there was nothing supernatural in the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh, but that his conduct arose from his own natural and blameable obstinacy, and that his case was thus generally understood, appears from what the Philistines say to one another when they were consulting about sending back the ark of God, which had been taken; when instead of furnishing them with a permanent cause of triumph, they found themselves grievously incommoded by it. 1 Sam. vi. 6. *Wherefore, then, do*

ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians, and Pharaoh, hardened their hearts, when he had wrought wonderfully among them? Did they not let the people go, and they departed.

I would farther observe with respect to these objections, and also to that from the destruction of the Canaanites, and other violations of the common rules of moral conduct among men, that what we call *evil*, natural and moral, is continually employed in the course of Divine Providence as the means of producing *good*, and that there can be no just objection to this in the conduct of any being, provided all the consequences of things could be foreseen and attended to, as they are by the Supreme Being. The reason why our choice of means to gain the same good end is limited by the usual rules of morality, is the imperfection of our knowledge. On this account, the rule of our conduct is in many cases different from that of God's. We must not *do evil that good may come*, because we cannot be sure that good *will* come of it. But in this foresight, as well as in every thing else, God is infallible. He

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sees the end from the beginning, and therefore in his conduct the introduction of partial evil may have the best effect.

We are not to expect that the author of revelation should be any other Being than the author of Nature, or that he should conduct himself by any other rules. And he who often destroys whole cities and countries by means of earthquakes, and other natural causes, might choose to effect the destruction of the Canaanites by the sword of the children of Israel. And there was this obvious reason for it, that by expressly commissioning them to effect this extirpation, he signified in the least equivocal manner his displeasure at the conduct of the inhabitants of this country, for their abominable idolatrous practices, as a warning to the Israelites, who were to be a people devoted to his sole worship, for the instruction of all mankind.

Lastly, Though the history of the deliverance of the Israelites from their state of bondage in Egypt, and their settlement in the land of Canaan, be an extraordinary one, abounding with miraculous events,

which require a proportionally clear evidence, we have seen that the evidence of the facts is as full and clear as the case, or as any case, can require; and the object of the whole scheme to which these events were an introduction, was of proportional importance. It was nothing less than to impress upon mankind the belief of the existence and providence of the one true God, the purity of his worship, the knowledge of our moral duty in this life, and of our expectations in another. For this great purpose it pleased God to make one nation the medium of all his communications with mankind, and to distinguish them by a particular providence, that they might appear in the most conspicuous light to the whole world, and attract universal attention. This the nation of the Jews has done to a considerable degree in all ages. Originally they were situated in the very centre of all the civilized nations of the world, and as civilization extended, they by one means or another became most wonderfully dispersed through all countries; and at this day they are almost literally every where,
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the most conspicuous, and in the eye of reason and religion, the most respectable, nation on the face of the earth.

It has been by means of prophets of this nation, and especially Jesus Christ, that the world has been recovered, as far as this recovery has taken place, from the deplorable state of superstition and idolatry into which it was universally sunk. This nation had originally as much to learn concerning God, a Providence, and a future state, as any other, and they had not naturally any better sources of information; but having been *taught of God*, they, or their disciples, are the instructors of all the world; and the lessons they give us are equally instructive, whether they themselves have suffered for their disobedience, or flourished in consequence of their obedience. And the most important and convincing of all the lessons they are destined to give the world, what we have reason to believe will put an end to all infidelity, will be the result of their promised restoration to their present desolated country, from their present miserable, despised, and dispersed

dispersed condition. For who but he, who alone can see into futurity, could foresee an event so distant and so complicated? And as their dispersion and preservation correspond, as I shall shew in a future Discourse, with such wonderful exactness to antient prophecies, there is no reasonable cause of doubt but that their restoration and future flourishing state will correspond to the many predictions concerning it with equal exactness. With those who, for want of attention (for it cannot be owing to any thing else) are unbelievers at present, the issue of the whole must rest on this future event, which cannot fail to arrest, and most forcibly engage, the attention of all mankind.

DEUT. i. 1.

THESSE be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan, in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red Sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab.

DEUT. iv. 1—40.

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes, and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the Lord did because of Baal-peor: for all the men that followed Baal-peor, the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day. Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments
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so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons: Specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in Horeb, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children. And ye came near, and stood under the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it. Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, (for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire,) Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female; The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air; The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou

thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day. Furthermore the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and sware that I should not go over Jordan, and that I should not go in unto that good land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance. But I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan: but ye shall go over, and possess that good land. Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing which the Lord thy God hath forbidden thee. For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and shalt have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke him to anger; I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But if from thence thou shalt

thalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice, (For the Lord thy God is a merciful God,) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers, which he swore unto them. For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else besides him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee; and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire, and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee, greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day. Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that

that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever.

DEUT. vi. 1—25.

Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee; thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life, and that thy days may be prolonged.

Hear, therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sleepest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand; and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and

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on thy gates. And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou buildest not, And houses full of all good things which thou filledst not, and wells digged which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive-trees which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you;) lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.

Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted him in Massah. Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers; To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the Lord hath spoken. And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord our God hath commanded you? Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And the Lord shewed signs and wonders,
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great and fore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.

DEUT. vii. 1—26.

When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them; Neither shalt thou make marriages with them: thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

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The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; (for ye were the fewest of all people;) But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know, therefore, that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him, and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them.

Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he swore unto thy fathers. And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle. And the Lord will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee. And thou shalt consume all the people which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee;

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thine eye shall have no pity upon them ; neither shalt thou serve their gods ; for that will be a snare unto thee. If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I, how can I dispossess them ? Thou shalt not be afraid of them ; but shalt well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt : The great temptations which thine eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched-out arm, whereby the Lord thy God brought thee out ; so shall the Lord thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid. Moreover the Lord thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide themselves from thee, be destroyed. Thou shalt not be affrighted at them : for the Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible. And the Lord thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little : thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But the Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven : there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them. The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire ; thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein : for it is an abomination to the Lord thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it : but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it ; for it is a cursed thing.

DISCOURSE VII.

Of the miraculous Events from the Time of Joshua to the Babylonish Captivity.

He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded to our fathers, that they should make them known to their children, that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise, and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

PSALM lxxviii. 5, 6, 7.

IN the preceding Discourses I laid before you the evidence of the divine mission of Moses, and the credibility of the miraculous events which accompanied the deliverance of the Israelites from their bondage in
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Egypt,

Egypt, and their settlement in the land of Canaan. These miracles were strictly connected with the promulgation of a system of religion essentially different from any that prevailed in the world at that time, and infinitely superior to them all; consisting in the worship of the one true God, the maker of heaven and earth, and the supreme disposer of all events; a religion which admitted into its rites nothing impure or cruel, and which was eminently subservient to the practice of moral virtue. It was a religion free from the absurd, but then universally prevalent, arts of divination, magic, and necromancy; but which supplied the people from time to time with real prophets, who announced to them the will of God, and occasionally foretold things to come.

By this means the Israelites were forever prevented from wholly abandoning their religion, though, deceived by the same fallacious appearances which led the rest of the world into the worship of a multiplicity of deities, and fascinated by the licentious rites of their religions, the ma-

majority of the nation frequently conformed to the worship of their heathen neighbours. It by no means appears that the nation in general ever disbelieved the miraculous events recorded in the books of Moses, or the supreme divinity of the God of their fathers; but they were willing to think that, consistently with this, they might be indulged in the worship of inferior deities, and derive both pleasure and advantage from the rites to which all the great nations around them were addicted. After any general or long continued neglect of their religion, they were, in a course of an extraordinary providence, brought back to it by severe judgments. But the same influence which deceived the rest of the world in time affected them as before, till the long captivity in Babylon, and what they had an opportunity of observing there, effectually cured them of all proneness to idolatry.

Some think these relapses of the Israelites into idolatry, after the many miracles to which their ancestors had been witnesses, absolutely incredible. But it should
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be considered, that this defection to idolatry, to which they had been addicted in Egypt, did not take place till after the death of Joshua and his contemporaries, that is, while the miraculous events were recent; and that the Israelites did not, in general, do more than join the worship of other Gods to that of their own. Also, whatever they might have been taught by Moses, or independently of him, concerning a future state, the proper object of his institutions was temporal prosperity; and they saw other nations flourishing notwithstanding their idolatry. They might, therefore, cherish the hope that prosperity was not necessarily connected with the observance of their peculiar institutions, especially as their calamity did not follow their defection very speedily, but by slow degrees.

Do not many Christians think, and act, much in the same manner? How many real believers in Christianity indulge themselves in practices which they know to be forbidden by it, either with the secret hope of after repentance, or willing to think that

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their favourite indulgences are not absolutely forbidden, or with some other excuse for them? How many unbelievers do things which they know to be contrary to that *reason* which they put in the place of *religion*? Let not these persons, then, greatly condemn the Israelites, or conclude their conduct to be absolutely unaccountable, and their history, for this reason, incredible.

These frequent relapses into idolatry, notwithstanding the calamities they never failed to bring upon the Israelitish nation, is a clear proof that they had no natural attachment to the religion instituted by Moses. Though so excellent, it was by no means the religion of their choice, but one that was forced upon them, by evidence which it was not in their power to resist. For what hindered their continuing to worship the gods of their neighbours, to which they were so very prone, as all other nations did, but some particular providence, accompanied with miraculous appearances peculiar to themselves? This is a consideration of the greatest importance
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to the credibility of the miraculous part of their history; as, in fact, the miracles were constantly exhibited not before friends, but enemies, that is, persons prejudiced against the object of them.

The history of the Israelites shews that this nation was never long without some miraculous appearances, all of which were, no doubt, directly or indirectly, calculated to confirm them in the belief of the truth, and divine origin, of their religion. But the first miracle that occurs, which was more particularly calculated to demonstrate the superiority of their God to those of their neighbours, was the fall of the statue of Dagon before the ark, and the judgments that befel the Philistines who took it.

This very warlike and powerful nation had been permitted to harass and oppress the Israelites; and these being defeated in battle, and recollecting the wonders wrought in their favour when the ark was in their camp (as when the river Jordan was divided before the priests who carried it, and when the walls of Jericho fell down at its presence)

presence) presumptuously, and without any divine direction, fetched the ark into their camp. *Let us, say they, 1 Sam. iv. 3, fetch the ark of the covenant of Jehovah out of Shiloh, unto us; that when it cometh to us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.* When they had done so, they felt themselves full of confidence, so that it is said *they shouted with a great shout, and the earth rang again.*

The Philistines were no strangers to the history of the Israelites, and, like all other antient nations, ascribing their success to the superior power of their gods, were greatly alarmed at this event. For we read, ver. 7. *And the Philistines were afraid. For they said, God is come into the camp. Woe unto us; for there has not been such a thing heretofore. Woe unto us, who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.* However, recovering from their consternation, and exerting themselves in the battle, they gained the victory, and took the ark itself,

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This was, no doubt, a cause of great exultation to the Philistines, who, considering it as a triumph of their god Dagon over the God of the Israelites, carried the ark into his temple. But their triumph was not of long continuance. For, as we read, Ch. v. 3, *Rising early in the morning, they found Dagon laid on his face before the ark.* This must have been performed by miracle, as the image was not broken, as it would have been by a natural fall, from being unequally poised, and the foundation by any accident giving way, unless the image had been of wood, in which case the next event must have been miraculous.

The Philistines, not wholly disconcerted by this disaster, and willing, no doubt, to attribute it to some accident, though they might not be able satisfactorily to account for it, set the image in his place again. But early the next morning they found something more disastrous still; for *the head of Dagon, and both the palms of his hands, were cut off upon the threshold,* to which it is probable they must have been carried from some distance; for it is most likely

likely that, as in other heathen temples, the image would be placed opposite to the door, in the most remote part of the building. It is added, that *only the stump of Dagon was left to him*; so that *this* could not have been a fall of the image, but a violent separation of its parts, and therefore unquestionably miraculous.

Alarmed at this second disaster, the Philistines do not appear to have made any attempt to repair or replace the image, and perhaps removed the ark from the temple. But the divine interposition did not end here. The people of Ashdod, who had the custody of the ark, were universally visited with a sore plague of emrods, while the rest of the nation were free from it; and ascribing this to the presence of the ark, it was by common consent removed to Gath. The people of Gath being afflicted with the same plague, they sent it to Ekron. But the inhabitants of this city were so terrified at its approach, that they sent and assembled all the lords of the Philistines, and by them it was agreed to send it back, *lest, as they said, it slay us and our people.*

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For, it is added, there was a deadly destruction throughout all their cities; the hand of God was very heavy there, and the men that died not were smitten with emrods, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The whole nation being now thoroughly alarmed, they agreed to send away the ark without any farther delay, and with presents, to appease the anger of the God to whom it was sacred. *Wherefore, said they, Ch. vi. 6, Do ye harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he wrought wonderfully among them. Did they not let the people go? But, to ascertain whether what had befallen them was owing to a real miracle, or not, they agreed to place the ark upon a cart, and that it should be drawn by milch cows, whose calves were left at home, which it was well known the cows would not naturally leave. See, say they, Ch. v. 9, If it go up by the way of its own coast, to Bethshemesb, then he (i. e. Jehovah) has done us this great evil; but if not, we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us. It was a chance that happened to us. Accordingly,*

as we read, *they did so, and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home.* The event must have satisfied them that what they had suffered was no chance, but the judgment of a superior power. For, as we read, ver. 12. *The cows took the straight way, the way to Bethshemesb, and went along the high way, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them, unto the borders of Bethshemesb.*

It may be said, that this story is written by Hebrews, and therefore of suspicious authenticity. But the taking of the ark, or the not taking of it, by their enemies, must have been a thing of such notoriety, and importance, that no historian would have ventured to record what was known to be untrue with respect to it. A fiction so extravagant as this, could never have gained credit, and least of all with a people not naturally prejudiced in favour of their religion, but always inclined to that of their neighbours. And if the ark *was* taken by the Philistines, the return of it

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was a sufficient proof of its being in consequence of a miracle. For nothing could have induced the Philistines voluntarily to give up such a trophy of their victory, so clear a monument, as they would consider it, of the superiority of their gods to the God of their enemies.

Besides, the subsequent history of the Israelites is a proof of the authenticity of this event. For after this we do not, of a long time, read of any relapse into idolatry; and the observance of their own religion was thoroughly established in the succeeding times of David and Solomon, during which the country enjoyed a distinguished state of prosperity and glory.

By the folly and obstinacy of Rehoboam the ten tribes revolted from the house of David. And it was the policy of Jeroboam, whom they made their king, in order to prevent his subjects from returning to the house of David, to provide a different mode and place of worship for them; but still the difference was only in mode and form, and not with respect to its object. For it was the worship of Jehovah
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by the images of calves, to which they had been accustomed in Egypt, where Jeroboam himself had resided during his banishment from his own country in the reign of Solomon. These calves he set up at Dan in the northern part of the country, and at Bethel in the southern.

The posterity of Jeroboam was cut off in the fourth generation, according to an express prophecy delivered to him. Baasha, who succeeded them, trod in his steps, notwithstanding the same sentence passed upon him, and which was executed by Zimri, who was dethroned by Omri. Ahab, the son of Omri, who married Jezebel, a daughter of the idolatrous king of Tyre, went beyond all his predecessors in idolatry and wickedness. For we read, 1 Kings xvi. 31; *As if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And Ahab made a grove, and he did more to provoke Jehovah, the God of Israel, to anger, than all the kings of Israel that went before him.* This was the introduction of the worship of another
God,

God, with rites of a peculiarly horrid nature.

In this reign, at a time of general apostasy, appeared the famous prophet Elijah the Tishbite, who opened his commission with denouncing the judgments of God upon the country in a drought of three years continuance, followed, of course, by a dreadful famine. In the last period of this great judgment Elijah met Ahab, who accosted him by saying, 1 Kings xviii. 17, *Art thou he who troubleth Israel?* The prophet answered, *I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandment of Jehovah, and have followed Baalim.*

After this the prophet made the following fair proposal, in order to determine which of the two, *Jehovah*, or *Baal*, was the true God; 1 Kings xviii. 21. *Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long balt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.* The people being silent, the prophet proceeded as follows: *I, even I only, remain a prophet of Jehovah, but Baal's pro-*

phets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them, therefore, give us two bullocks, and let them chuse one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. Then call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah; and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God.

To this the people agreed, ver. 24. *And the people answered, and said, It is well spoken.* By this time the long drought and famine must have led the people to suspect the power of the new God, whose worship they had adopted. They were therefore the better disposed to listen to the proposal of Elijah. And as the miracle which followed was particularly calculated to establish the truth of the religion of the Hebrews, as delivered by Moses, in a time of general apostasy from it, so that it is of more importance than any of the miracles subsequent to the time of Moses, I shall dwell the longer on the circumstances of it.

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The priests of Baal, having nothing to object to the fair proposal of Elijah, took the bullock which they had chosen, and dressed it; and having placed it on the wood, they called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, ver. 26, *O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered.* This continued till the time of evening sacrifice, these priests having recourse to all their usual modes of invocation, one of which was to cut themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out, while Elijah, confident of his success, mocked them, saying, v. 27, *Cry aloud, for he is a God. Either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.*

The priests of Baal having tried all their arts to no purpose, Elijah's turn came; and by way of preparation, he repaired an old altar, building it of twelve stones, and making a trench all round it; and when he had placed the sacrifice on the wood, in order to make the miracle as unexceptionable as possible, he bade the people fill the

trench with water, and to drench both the sacrifice and the wood with it. This was done even three times, till, as we read, *the water ran round about the altar, and he filled the trench with the water.*

When this was done, and the time of the evening sacrifice approached, Elijah made the following prayer, ver. 36, *Jehovah, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me that this thy people may know that thou, Jehovah, art God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.*

Having pronounced this prayer, in the hearing of all the people, the purport of it was fully accomplished. For as we read, ver. 38, *Then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the very stones, and dried up the water that was in the trench.*

Nothing now remained to complete the conviction of all the people, who were spectators of so great and evident a miracle.

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And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and said, Jehovah he is God, Jehovah he is God. And being satisfied with respect to this great article, they could not refuse complying with the express order of God by Moses, which was to put to death those priests of Baal who had seduced them to their apostasy from their own God. For thus the history proceeds, And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape; and they took them, and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kidron, and slew them there. Immediately upon this an end was put to the long and destructive drought, the rain coming in torrents.

After this we read no more of Ahab worshipping Baal; though, at the instigation of his wife, he had the wickedness to contrive the murder of Naboth, in order to get possession of his vineyard; and in consequence he was, according to the prediction of a prophet, slain in battle, the dogs licking his blood in the very place where that of Naboth had been shed.

His son Jehoash, as we read, 2 Kings iii. 21, *Wrought evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father, or like his mother ; for he put away the images of Baal which his father had made. Nevertheless he clave to the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and departed not therefrom.* Jehu, also, who destroyed all the posterity of Ahab, agreeable to a prediction to that purpose, and who put to death the priests of Baal, adhered to the worship of Jeroboam's calves, 2 Kings x. 29. This too was the case with all the remaining kings of Israel. We read no more of any public encouragement given to the worship of Baal, though it must have been practised by many individuals, or there could not have been found so many priests of Baal as were put to death by Jehu, after the slaughter of them by Elijah. And when the reasons are given for God's forsaking that nation, and giving them up to be conquered, and carried into captivity by the kings of Assyria, it is said, 2 Kings xvii. 16, *They left all the commandments of Jehovah their God, and made them*

them molten images, even two calves; and they made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal; and they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divinations and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of Jehovah, to provoke him to anger. Therefore was Jehovah angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight.

We see, however, the evidence of this great miracle of Elijah in the effects which it produced; as it seems to have put a stop to the more public worship of Baal, to which the prince and the people had been long addicted, and to have established the belief of the superiority of Jehovah, the God of Israel. And, indeed, nothing could have been better calculated to answer the purpose.

This miracle was performed in public, due notice was given beforehand, and it was in the presence of enemies; the prophet of Jehovah being but one, and the priests of Baal four hundred and fifty men, the prince and consequently all the great men in the nation favouring them. Un-

protected as Elijah was, it might have been in their power to impose upon him, as by privately introducing fire to consume the sacrifice, but it could not have been in his power to impose upon them. To cut off all suspicion of the kind, he made it as difficult as possible for the fire to have any effect on the sacrifice. The priests of Baal had all the time that they could wish for, having been employed from morning till the time of evening sacrifice. But on the prayer of Elijah, in the very unfavourable circumstances that have been described, the fire took place in an instant, and not only were the wood, and the sacrifice, consumed, but even the water in the trench that had been made round it dissipated, and the stones themselves consumed, probably *calcined*, which is the greatest effect of fire upon stone. Consequently, it could not be denied that Jehovah appeared to be the God of nature, the sole author and controller of its laws.

There is another event in the subsequent part of the reign of Ahab, well calculated to confirm him and the people of Israel in
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the worship of Jehovah as the God of universal nature. The Syrians, having been defeated by the Israelites in a battle fought in the hill country, imagined, as we read 2 Kings xx. 23, *that the Gods of Israel were Gods of the hills. Therefore, said they, they are stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they.* On this, as we read ver. 28, *there came a man of God, and spake to the king of Israel and said, Thus saith Jehovah; Because the Syrians have said that Jehovah is God of the hills, but he is not God of the vallies, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thy hand, and ye shall know that I am Jehovah.* Accordingly we read that, though the army of the Israelites were like *two little flocks of kids*, while that of the Syrians *filled the country*; when the battle was fought in the plain, the Israelites slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day.

Having given this general view of the most important of the miraculous events that occur in the history of the kingdom of Israel, I shall consider those that occur
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in the history of Judah, which are no less remarkable, and equally calculated to confirm the people in their attachment to their religion, notwithstanding their proneness to idolatry.

The kingdom of Judah had many excellent and pious princes, strict observers of the laws of Moses, but several of them apostatized to the idolatrous customs of the neighbouring nations. It is remarkable that even Solomon, who built the temple, and to whom God had appeared twice, from complaisance to his wives of foreign nations, not only permitted them to introduce the worship of the Gods of their respective countries, but himself, at least, occasionally joined them in it. His son Rehoboam did the same, and no doubt encouraged the common people to do it. Indeed, such examples were sufficient without any positive precept. In this reign, as we read, 1 Kings xiv. 22, *the people did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins, which they had committed above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images,*

images, and groves on every high hill, and under every green tree, and there were Sodomites also in the land. For even this unnatural vice was a rite in some of the heathen religions, especially in Egypt, where it was imagined that the regular rise of the Nile (on which the fertility of Egypt depends) was connected with that abominable practice in the priests, and it was not abolished till the time of Constantine. *And they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.*

After the two pious princes Aſa and Jehoſhaphat, came Jehoram, who, having married a daughter of Ahab, adopted his religion, which was the worſhip of Baal, after the manner of the Tyrians; and his ſon Ahaziaſh trod in his ſteps. In the reign of Joaſh the worſhip of the true God was reſtored by the pious high-prieſt Jehoiada, and the ſucceeding princes are not much blamed till we come to Ahaz, who is ſaid, 2 Chron. xxviii. 2. *to have walked in the ways of the kings of Iſrael; and to have made molten images for Baalim. Moreover he*
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burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, after the abominations of the Heathens, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.

Ahaz was succeeded by the pious Hezekiah, in whose reign there occurs a miracle the most directly calculated to establish the sole divinity of the God of Israel, and consequently the truth of the Mosaic dispensation, of any that we find in the history of the kings of Judah.

The ten tribes had been conquered, and carried into captivity, by Shalmanezzer king of Assyria, in the sixth year of Hezekiah, agreeably to an express prediction of the prophet Isaiah, delivered in the first year of Ahaz ; and in the fourteenth of his reign Sennacherib, another king of Assyria, having greatly enlarged the bounds of his empire, invaded Judah ; and having taken some of the defenceless cities, he sent an insulting message to Hezekiah, demanding the surrender of his country, and admonishing him not to trust in the protection of his God. In his address to the people
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on this occasion he says, Isa. xxxvi. 18, &c. *Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Jehovah will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hands of the kings of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath, and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who are these among all the gods of thy land, that have delivered their land out of my hands, that Jehovah should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?* I cannot help observing by the way, how temporal prosperity was considered in these times as a proof of the power of the gods that were acknowledged by different nations; and on this account, perhaps, as I have observed, the true God was pleased to propose temporal felicity as the sanction of the religion instituted by Moses, taking the test of real divinity that was actually adopted by all nations. But to resume the thread of this remarkable history.

In this distressing situation this pious prince, having no sufficient force to oppose to this haughty and powerful invader,
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applied to the prophet Isaiah, who immediately answered, ch. xxxvii. 6. *Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith Jehovah, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria has blasphemed me. Behold I will send a blast upon him, and he shall bear a rumour, and return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.*

After this a letter was sent by the king of Assyria to Hezekiah, to the same purport with the preceding message. This letter Hezekiah took to the temple, Isa. xxxvii. 14. *and spread it before the Lord; at the same time making the following solemn prayer! O Lord of Hosts, God of Israel, who dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O Lord, and bear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see, and bear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all nations, and their countries, and have*

have cast their gods into the fire ; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone ; therefore they have destroyed them. Now, therefore, O Jehovah, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou alone.

Upon this Isaiah was directed to send to the king, and he concluded his message with saying, *Therefore, thus saith Jehovah, concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith Jehovah ; for I will defend this city, to save it, for my own sake, and my servant David's sake.*

The event verified this prediction ; for after this we read, ver. 30, *Then the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred and fourscore and five thousand ; and when they (the remainder) rose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.* This sudden destruction of the army of the Assyrians is mentioned

mentioned by Herodotus, the oldest heathen historian. After this, to verify the remainder of the prophecy, the following events took place. Sennacherib, after his return to Nineveh his capital, was killed by two of his sons, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, as it were to demonstrate the impotence of this boasted god to save his most zealous worshipper.

Notwithstanding this most extraordinary event, Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, but who was born after this time, and who came to the throne at the early age of twelve years, falling, as we may well suppose, into the hands of evil counsellors, revolted to the worship of Baal, and, as we read, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 3, *worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.* He even built altars to them in the temple itself. *He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord, and he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. Also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit,*

spirit, and with wizards. For this he was carried captive to Babylon; but, on his repentance, he was restored to his own country.

The only good reign after this was that of Josiah, and in thirty years after his death the long threatened judgments of God overtook that apostate nation, for they were conquered, Jerusalem and the temple destroyed, and the people carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, about a hundred years after the conquest and captivity of the ten tribes by the Assyrians.

During this long captivity in Babylon, continuing, according to the express prediction of Jeremiah, seventy years, God did not forsake his chosen people. Two eminent prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel, whose predictions look into the remotest times, even beyond those in which we live, were raised up there, and in Babylon itself, emphatically called the *mother of harlots*, or idols, a city the most noted for its addictedness to idolatry of any in the ancient world, and as it were the parent of

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idolatry

idolatry to all the rest. We find at this time signal displays of the power of the true God, in direct opposition to this idolatry; and the miracles which were wrought for this purpose evidently had a great effect at the time, and probably so impressed the minds of Nebuchadnezzar, Darius the Mede, and Cyrus, as both to procure the Jews better treatment during the captivity, and their final release from it.

Daniel first brought himself into the favourable notice of Nebuchadnezzar and the people of Babylon, by being enabled not only to interpret a remarkable dream of that prince, but to inform him what the dream was when he had forgotten it himself, and when, as might be expected, all the astrologers and magicians of Babylon had not been able to do it. On this Nebuchadnezzar was induced to declare, Dan. ii. 47. *Of a truth, it is that your God is a God of Gods, and Lord of Lords, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.*

Daniel also interpreted another dream of Nebuchadnezzar, which foretold his own degradation,

degradation, and his restoration to his understanding and his kingdom, after a period of seven years, which drew from that prince a remarkable narrative, in the form of a public decree, to be circulated through his whole empire, addressed, in his own lofty style, *to all people, nations, and languages, that dwell upon all the earth.* It begins in this solemn manner, *I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders which the high God has wrought towards me. How great are his signs and how mighty are his wonders. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.* And it concludes thus, *Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honour, the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.*

Lastly, Daniel interpreted the awful handwriting on the wall at the impious feast of Belshazzar, and thereby foretold the fall of the Babylonian empire, which was immediately accomplished; for in that very night was Belshazzar slain, and the kingdoms of the Medes and Persians established.

Under Darius the Mede Daniel was miraculously delivered from the den of lions, into which he had been thrown for the profession of his religion by a decree artfully drawn from that king. That these lions did not spare Daniel on account of some casual indisposition, appeared from their seizing and devouring his enemies, whom the king ordered to be thrown to the same lions as soon as Daniel was taken out of the den. For we read, Dan. vi. 24. *that they brake all their bones in pieces, or ever they came to the bottom of the den.* This remarkable deliverance drew from Darius as remarkable a decree. Dan. vi. 25. *Then King Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth, Peace be multiplied. I make a decree that, in every dominion of my kingdom, men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and standeth for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end; who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.*

But

But the miracle that was more particularly calculated to demonstrate the superiority of the true God with respect to the idols of Babylon, was one in which Daniel had no personal concern. It was the deliverance of his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, from the fiery furnace, for refusing to fall down and worship a golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up. The furnace was even heated seven times for this purpose, and yet these three men, the worshippers of the true God, after they were cast into it, were seen walking about at their ease, in the midst of the fire, accompanied by a fourth person, who was probably an angel. Nebuchadnezzar, having himself seen them in this situation, ordered them to be called out, and then made the following declaration and decree; Dan. iii. 28. *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants who trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any God except their own God. Therefore I*

make a decree, that all people, nations, and languages, which speak any thing amiss of, (or against) the God of Shadrach, Mesbech, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their house shall be made a dunghill, because there is no other god that can deliver after this sort. Thus were these idolators brought to confess the superiority of the true God; and though these miracles did not induce them to abandon the worship of their own gods, they must have made a strong impression in favour of the Jews and their religion.

The impression which these miracles made on the Babylonians, and other foreign nations, does not appear for want of sufficiently ample histories of those times. But the probability is that many individuals, though not any whole nation, became converts to the fundamental principles of the Jewish religion, as great numbers did in after times without becoming proper proselytes to Judaism. This was remarkably the case in our Saviour's time. Many of the Gentiles, especially such as resided in Judea, or the neighbourhood of it, as
Cornelius

Cornelius of Cæsarea and the centurion of Capernaum, rejected the absurdities of polytheism, and privately worshipped the one true God. This we also find had the happiest effect on their conduct, as in those two persons, who were eminent for their piety and benevolence, and of whom by accident we have a particular account. And this, it is to be observed, was antecedent to, and independently of, any thing that was done by Christ, or Christianity. It is also observable that we meet with no miracles, or pretension to miracles, from the time of the Babylonish captivity to the time of Christ; so that whatever good impressions had been made on the minds of any in favour of the Jewish religion, it must have been produced by the miracles of preceding ages, and therefore their credibility must have been well established.

Whatever was the effect of these miraculous events on the neighbouring nations, the impression was never effaced from the minds of the Jews. For, from having been, in a remarkable degree, prone to idolatry, (which is a circumstance highly favour-

able to the credibility of the miracles calculated to counteract that tendency) it is from this æra that we date their peculiarly unshaken attachment to their religion, and their inexpressible aversion to idolatry, and to every thing approaching to it.

Two circumstances, besides the direct impression of the miracles above mentioned, may have contributed to this. The first was the complete fulfilment of the prophecies of Moses concerning their being driven from their own country, on account of their addictedness to idolatry, and the vices accompanying it, together with the equally literal fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah respecting their return, and the fall of the Babylonish empire. Their sufferings before this had been slight, and of short continuance compared with these.

The second circumstance was the clear conviction that the idols of Babylon had not been able to defend that city from the arms of the Medes and Persians, who had no idols, and whose conquest had been foretold by Daniel. And it must not be forgotten, that in those days, and long after,

after, the great test of the goodness of any religion was the temporal prosperity with which the observance of its rites was accompanied; on which account, as I have observed before, 'temporal prosperity might have been annexed by the Divine Being to the observance of the Jewish religion. Whereas, however, the history of other nations, examined by this test, is far from furnishing any proof of the truth of their religions, that of the Jews, from their taking possession of the land of Canaan to their captivity in Babylon (in which, being of considerable extent, they had sufficient leisure to reflect on the subject) supplies an abundant proof of the truth of theirs. Nothing, however, but this full conviction can account for the remarkable fact, of the total change in the disposition and hearts of the whole Jewish nation after this time, and which has continued to this day, without the least prospect of a change; though in all this time they do not pretend that any miracles have been wrought in attestation of it. For though they had prophets after their return from Babylon, viz. Haggai, Zechariah,

Zechariah, and Malachi, it does not appear that they wrought any miracles. They only foretold future and distant events, and exhorted the people in the name of God.

This important subject of prophecy I reserve for the subject of another discourse.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE VIII.

**Of the Prophecies concerning the
Dispersion and Restoration of the
Jews.**

*I call heaven and earth to record this day
against you, that I have set before you
life and death, blessing and cursing.*

DEUT. XXX. 19.

IN my last discourse I observed that the remarkable change in the disposition and conduct of the Jews, which took place from the time of the Babylonish captivity, may be, in a great measure, at least, accounted for, from the very striking fulfilment of the prophecies of Moses and Jeremiah in that captivity. The prophecies of Moses concerning the calamities and intire dispersion of the Israelites, and likewise his prophecies, and those of others who succeeded him, concerning their return to
their

their own country, after their expulsion from it, and their dispersion into all parts of the world, and concerning their prosperous state afterwards, are so very remarkable, and add so much to the evidence of the divine mission of Moses, and of those other prophets, and consequently to that of the truth of the Jewish religion, that, after considering, as I have done, the *miracles* that were expressly wrought for that purpose, I shall make *them* the subject of this discourse.

The prophecies of Moses will appear more extraordinary, if we consider the circumstances of the Israelites at the time in which they were delivered. They had just left Egypt, and had not then obtained possession of the land of Canaan; and yet Moses not only speaks with the greatest certainty of their conquering that country, then fully peopled, and in the possession of nations far more powerful than they, but of their future expulsion from that country, in consequence of sins not then committed, and to appearance very unlikely ever to be committed, viz. an apostasy from their religion,

religion, confirmed by recent miracles, of which it was impossible that they should entertain the smallest doubt. But what is infinitely more extraordinary, he foretels their restoration to their country in a very distant period; and that after this they should be the first of nations, and that all the promises of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, would then be illustriously fulfilled.

Moses not only foretold the calamities of the Israelites, and their expulsion from the promised land, *conditionally*, in which case it could not have been considered as much more than a threatening, but *absolutely*. For thus we read, Deut. xxxi. 16. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land whither they go to be among them, and forsake me, and break the covenant which I have made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, Are not these*

these evils come upon us because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they have wrought, in that they are turned to other gods. Accordingly Moses says, Deut. xxxi. 29. I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you, and evil will befall you in the latter days, because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger, through the work of your hands.

As a more solemn warning still, Moses was directed to compose a hymn, in which particular mention should be made of the judgments of God in consequence of their future apostasy, a hymn which he was to commit to writing, and which the people were to learn by heart. Deut. xxxi. 19. *Now, therefore, write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel. For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swore unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey, and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat, then will they turn to other gods, and serve them,*
and

and provoke me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass that when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them, as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouth of their seed. For I know their imagination which they go about, even now before I have brought them into the land which I swore. Moses therefore wrote the song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel. This remarkable song, or poetical composition, remains to this day; and yet the nation, though warned in this uncommonly solemn manner, brought upon themselves all the calamities announced in it.

This prophecy concerning the judgments of God upon the Israelitish nation, and especially so remarkable an event as their expulsion from the land of Canaan, and their dispersion among all nations, is not contained in a single obscure passage in the writings of Moses, but it is repeated again and again, in the plainest language that can be used. Nor is the prophecy expressed in general terms only, but many particulars are mentioned, and all of them
are

are so fully come to pass, as is evident at this day, that every person who gives due attention to the facts must be struck with the correspondence.

You will farther observe the peculiar solemnity, and affection, with which these judgments are announced. Had Moses been literally the father of the whole nation he could not have expressed himself with more affectionate concern. Deut. iv. 25. *And when thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and shalt have remained long in the land, and shalt corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or likeness of any thing, and shalt do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against thee this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go beyond Jordan to possess it. Ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the Heathen whither the Lord shall lead you, and there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone,*
which

which neither hear, nor see, nor eat, nor smell.

This is a subject much dwelt upon by this eminent legislator and prophet; and in other passages of his writings some more circumstances attending these great calamities, and this total dispersion of the Israelites, are mentioned. In Lev. xxvi. 31, he says, *Ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat, and I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. And I will bring the land into desolation, and your enemies shall dwell therein, and be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the Heathen, and I will draw out a sword after you, and your lands shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. And ye shall perish among the Heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up.*

Deut. xxviii. 25. *The Lord shall cause you to be smitten before your enemies. Thou shalt*

shalt go out one way against them, and shalt flee seven ways before them, and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. Ver. 36, The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, (And this you will observe was written before the Israelites had any king, and when their constitution did not suppose any) unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, and a proverb, and a by-word, among the nations whither the Lord shall lead thee. Ver. 47, Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things, therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in the want of all things; and they shall be a yoke of iron upon thy neck until he has destroyed thee. The Lord shall bring against thee from afar, from the ends of the earth, as swift as the eagle flyeth, a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard

regard the persons of the old, nor shew favour to the young. And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all the land. Ver. 62, And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars in the heaven for multitude, because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the Lord thy God. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other. And among those nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and fainting of eyes, and sorrow of mind. Ver. 68, And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee. Thou shalt see it no more again. And ye shall be sold unto your enemies, for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you.

The manner in which both the Israelites in distant ages, and strangers, who shall see the accomplishment of these awful pre-

dictions, shall be impressed by them, is particularly mentioned by this prophet; Deut. xxix. 22. *The generation to come, of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the Lord shall lay upon it;—even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers which he made with them, when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt. For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses which are written in this book. And the Lord rooted them out of this land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.*

The well known history, and present state, of the Jews make it unnecessary for

for me to dwell long upon the accomplishment of these remarkable prophecies. The extermination and dispersion of the Israelites began at the captivity of the ten tribes by the Assyrians, followed by that of the tribe of Judah by the Babylonians, but was in the most signal manner completed by the Romans, a nation that indeed *came from far*, and *whose language they did not understand*. The war, conducted by Vespasian and Titus, was dreadfully calamitous, and the siege of Jerusalem such as yet remains unequalled for distress, and the destruction of men, in all history. So great was the famine with which they were pressed, that there are instances on record of women actually killing and eating their own children.

At the close of that war, all the markets for slaves were so much overstocked with Jews, that they bore no price, and great numbers were taken to Egypt by sea, and disposed of there. But even this was not the completion of their calamities. Under the emperor Adrian the Jews were effectually driven out of Judea, and none of them

suffered to reside in it. From this time the country has gradually become desert, so that hardly a vestige of its antient fertility can be found. All the inhabitants, of whom very few are Jews, one of the latest travellers says do not exceed fifty thousand.

Of the total dispersion of the Jews into all the most distant parts of the world, every nation, and among them ourselves, are witnesses. For there is no country on the face of the earth in which Jews are not to be found. And among those they have met with all the calamities predicted by Moses. Wherever they have gone, the sword has, indeed, followed them. We no where read of such massacres as have been made of the Jews, especially in all Christian countries; and in consequence of these events, they have been overwhelmed with dread and terror, fearful of every thing that can expose them to farther ill usage, as we see at this day; so that far from shewing any eagerness to make proselytes, as they were formerly wont to do, they carefully avoid making any, and give no encourage-

encouragement to the few who are disposed to join them. They are also at this very time, and have been for ages, a proverb, and a by-word, among all nations, no people being exposed to so much contempt and insult, as well as cruel usage of every other kind, as the Jews. How far they may have contributed to bring this ill usage upon themselves is not at all material to my purpose, the fact being indisputably such as Moses predicted.

In this great dispersion, the Jews have, in many cases, openly abandoned the religion of their ancestors, professing it secretly, but concealing it with the greatest care. This has been particularly the case with the Jews in Spain and Portugal, where many of them have not only made public profession of Christianity, but in that character have enjoyed high offices in the church, and even in the inquisition; and yet when they have made their escape, they have renounced every badge of Christianity, and gloried in their attachment to their own religion,

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But

But most literally has this prophecy been fulfilled in the ten tribes, few of whom ever returned to Palestine, and not being at present distinguished from other nations, they have, no doubt, adopted their idolatrous religions. It is not improbable, however, but that they somewhere form a distinct people, and that in due time their origin may be discovered. Some traces of them have of late appeared*. According to the sure word of prophecy, they are to be brought back to the land of Canaan, as well as the Jews.

The literal fulfilment of these prophecies concerning the calamities, and total dispersion, of the Israelites, must satisfy that nation, and in time all mankind, that Moses was inspired in delivering them. And therefore they have the fullest confidence in the accomplishment of his other prophecies concerning their future restoration, and flourishing state, which are as distinct

* Sir William Jones, with considerable probability conjectures that the Afghans, a people living between Persia and Indostan, are of Israelitish extraction.

and

and exprefs as thofe/ concerning their calamities, and far more numerous. They are not only contained in Mofes, but the favourite fubject is refumed, enlarged upon, and fet in a thoufand different lights, by Ifaiah, and moft of the fucceeding prophets. As this is a much more pleafing fubject than the former, and efpecially as I flatter myfelf we are now drawing fenfibly nearer to the accomplifhment of thefe prophecies, I fhall recite a confiderable number of them. You will find them equally clear and free from ambiguity, fo that there can be no doubt concerning their meaning, and confequently, if we believe in revelation, concerning their literal accomplifhment.

Mofes, who fo exprefsly foretold the difperſion of the Jews among the moft diftant nations of the world, ſays, Lev. xxvi. 44, *And yet for all this, when they ſhall be in the land of their enemies, I will not caſt them away, neither will I abhor them, to deſtroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them. I am the Lord their God, but will for their ſakes remember the covenant of their anceſtors, whom I brought forth*

forth out of the land of Egypt, in the sight of the Heathen, that I might be their God, I am the Lord.

Having foretold the dispersion of the Israelites into the most distant regions, he adds, Deut. iv. 29, ‘ But if from thence
 ‘ thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou
 ‘ shalt find him, if thou seek him with all
 ‘ thy heart, and with all thy soul. When
 ‘ thou art in tribulation, and all these things
 ‘ are come upon thee, even in the latter
 ‘ days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God,
 ‘ and shalt be obedient to his voice (for the
 ‘ Lord thy God is a merciful God) he will
 ‘ not forsake thee, nor destroy thee, nor
 ‘ forget the covenant of thy fathers, which
 ‘ he sware unto them. Ch. xxx. 1. And
 ‘ it shall come to pass when all these things
 ‘ are come upon thee, the blessing and the
 ‘ curse which I have set before thee, and
 ‘ thou shalt call them to mind, among all
 ‘ the nations whither the Lord thy God
 ‘ hath driven thee, and shalt return to the
 ‘ Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice,
 ‘ according to all that I command thee this
 ‘ day, thou and thy children, with all thy
 ‘ heart,

‘ heart, and with all thy soul, that then
‘ the Lord thy God will turn thy capti-
‘ vity, and have compassion upon thee, and
‘ will return, and gather thee from all the
‘ nations whither the Lord thy God hath
‘ scattered thee. And if any of thine be
‘ driven out to the uttermost part of heaven,
‘ from thence will the Lord thy God ga-
‘ ther thee, and from thence will he fetch
‘ thee. And the Lord will bring thee to
‘ the land which thy fathers possessed, and
‘ thou shalt possess it, and he will do thee
‘ good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.’
‘ That the future prosperity of the Israelites,
though thus conditionally announced, will
absolutely take place, what follows clearly
expresses. The nation will, in fact, be-
come such as the promise requires. ‘ And
‘ the Lord thy God will circumcise thine
‘ heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love
‘ the Lord thy God with all thy heart,
‘ and with all thy soul, that thou mayest
‘ live.’

After Moses we find no prophecy re-
lating to this subject till we come to the
latter times of the kings of Judah, about
eight

eight hundred years before the Christian æra. But they abound in the writings of Joel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah, and Daniel, before the return from Babylon, and in those of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, after it. To quote the whole of what these prophets say on this subject, would be to copy a great part, if not the greater part, of their prophecies. For the future flourishing state of their nation is the great and favourite theme of all their writings. But as the subject is of particular importance, and appears to me not to have been sufficiently attended to, or understood, by Christians, who have supposed many of the prophecies to have been figurative, and to have been designed to express the state of the Christian church, and not that of the Jewish nation, I shall recite a considerable number of the passages, to satisfy you they do not admit of any such figurative interpretation,

You will observe, as I recite them, that the prophecies concerning the restoration of the Israelites to the land of Palestine are generally accompanied with predictions of
the

the glorious state of this extraordinary, though now despised and abject, nation, after their return, and also concerning the heavy judgments which will fall upon all the nations that have oppressed them, and especially those who shall oppose their return, or endeavour to disturb them after it. You will clearly see, from the express mention that is made of the quiet and undisturbed enjoyment of their country, that is promised to the Israelites, that these prophecies were by no means fulfilled at the return from the Babylonish captivity.

The predictions concerning the return of the ten tribes is a farther evidence of the same thing; besides that after their restoration all the twelve tribes are to make but one nation, and are to be governed by a prince of the house of David. Then also will be a time of universal peace and happiness through all the world, all mankind becoming worshippers of the one true God, and having the highest respect for his peculiar people, if not under some kind of subjection to them. I shall recite the passages according to the order of the time in

which they were delivered, and without intermixing many particular observations by way of illustration ; for it will be seen, that they require none.

Amos ix. 14, 15. ‘ And I will bring again
‘ the captivity of my people Israel, and
‘ they shall build the waste cities and in-
‘ habit them, and they shall plant vine-
‘ yards and drink the wine thereof. They
‘ shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit
‘ of them. And I will plant them upon
‘ their land, and they shall no more be pul-
‘ led up out of their land which I have given
‘ them, saith the Lord thy God.’

Hosea iii. 4. ‘ For the children of Israel
‘ shall abide many days without a king,
‘ and without a prince, and without an
‘ ephod, and without teraphim. After-
‘ ward shall the children of Israel return,
‘ and seek the Lord their God, and David
‘ their king, and shall fear the Lord and
‘ his goodness in the latter days.’

Isa. ii. 1. ‘ It shall come to pass in the
‘ last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s
‘ house shall be established in the top of
‘ the mountains, and shall be exalted above
‘ the

‘ the hills, and all nations shall flow unto
‘ it. And many people shall go and say,
‘ Come ye, let us go up to the mountain
‘ of the Lord, to the house of the God of
‘ Jacob, and he will teach us his ways,
‘ and we will walk in his paths. For out
‘ of Zion shall go forth the law, and the
‘ word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And
‘ he shall judge among the nations, and
‘ rebuke many people; and they shall beat
‘ their swords into ploughshares, and their
‘ spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall
‘ not lift up sword against nation, neither
‘ shall they learn war any more.’

Isa. xi. 10. ‘ And in that day there
‘ shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand
‘ as an ensign for the people. To it shall
‘ the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be
‘ glorious. And it shall come to pass in
‘ that day, that the Lord shall set his hand
‘ again the second time to recover the rem-
‘ nant of his people, which shall be left
‘ from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from
‘ Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam,
‘ and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and
‘ from the islands of the sea. And he shall

‘ set up an ensign for the nations, and shall
 ‘ assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather
 ‘ together the dispersed of Judah, from the
 ‘ four corners of the earth. The envy also
 ‘ of Ephraim shall depart, and the adver-
 ‘ saries of Judah shall be cut off. Ephraim
 ‘ shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not
 ‘ vex Ephraim.’

Isa. xliii. 5. ‘ Fear not, for I am with
 ‘ thee. I will bring thy seed from the east,
 ‘ and gather thee from the west. I will
 ‘ say to the north, Give up; and to the
 ‘ south, Keep not back. Bring my sons
 ‘ from far, and my daughters from the ends
 ‘ of the earth.’

The regard that God retains for his an-
 tient people during their dispersion, is thus
 beautifully represented by this prophet;
 Ch. xlix. 14. ‘ But Zion said, Jehovah
 ‘ hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath
 ‘ forgotten me. Can a woman forget her
 ‘ sucking child, that she should not have
 ‘ compassion on the son of her womb?
 ‘ Yea they may forget, yet will I not for-
 ‘ get thee. Behold I have graven thee on
 ‘ the palms of my hands. Thy walls are
 ‘ continually

‘ continually before me. Ver. 22, Thus
‘ faith the Lord God, Behold I will lift up
‘ my hand to the Gentiles, and set up my
‘ standard to the people, and they shall
‘ bring thy sons in their arms, and thy
‘ daughters shall be carried upon their
‘ shoulders. And kings shall be thy nurs-
‘ ing fathers, and queens thy nursing mo-
‘ thers. They shall bow down to thee,
‘ with their faces to the earth, and lick up
‘ the dust of thy feet, and thou shalt know
‘ that I am the Lord. For they shall not
‘ be ashamed that wait for me. Shall the
‘ prey be taken from the mighty, or the
‘ lawful captive be delivered. But thus
‘ faith the Lord, Even the captives of the
‘ mighty shall be taken away, and the prey
‘ of the terrible shall be delivered. For I
‘ will contend with him that contendeth
‘ with thee, and I will save thy children.
‘ And I will feed them that oppress thee
‘ with their own flesh, and they shall be
‘ drunken with their own blood, as with
‘ sweet wine, and all flesh shall know that
‘ I, Jehovah, am thy Saviour, and thy re-
‘ deemer, the mighty one of Jacob.’

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The calamities and the dispersion of the Jews have been of long continuance; but, according to the following representation, all their sufferings will bear but a small proportion to their future glory and happiness. Isa. liv. ‘Thy Maker is thine husband, ‘the Lord of hosts is his name, and thy ‘redeemer the holy one of Israel; the God ‘of the whole earth shall he be called. For ‘the Lord hath called thee as a woman ‘forsaken, and grieved in spirit, and a wife ‘of youth, when thou wast refused, saith ‘thy God. For a small moment have I ‘forsaken thee, but with great mercies will ‘I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid ‘my face from thee, for a moment, but ‘with everlasting kindness will I have ‘mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy redeemer.’

Isa. lx. 4. ‘Lift thine eyes round ‘about, and see all they gather themselves ‘together. They come to thee. Thy ‘sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Ver. 9, ‘Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as ‘doves to their windows? Surely the isles

‘ shall wait for me, and the ships of Tar-
‘ shish first, to bring thy sons from far,
‘ their silver and their gold with them,
‘ unto the name of Jehovah thy God, and
‘ to the holy one of Israel, because he hath
‘ glorified thee. And the sons of strangers
‘ shall build up thy walls, and their kings
‘ shall minister unto thee; for in my wrath
‘ I smote thee, but in my favour have I
‘ had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates
‘ shall be open continually, they shall not
‘ be shut day nor night, that men may
‘ bring unto thee the forces’ (wealth) ‘ of
‘ the Gentiles, and that their kings may be
‘ brought. For the nation or kingdom
‘ that will not serve thee shall perish, yea
‘ those nations shall be utterly wasted. The
‘ glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee,
‘ the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box to-
‘ gether, to beautify the place of my sanc-
‘ tuary; and I will make the place of my
‘ feet glorious. The sons also of them
‘ that afflicted thee shall come bending unto
‘ thee, and all they that despised thee shall
‘ bow down themselves at the soles of thy
‘ feet, and they shall call thee the city of

Q 2

‘ Jehovah,

‘ Jehovah, the Zion of the holy one of Israel,
‘ Whereas thou hast been forsaken and
‘ hated, so that no man went through
‘ thee, I will make thee an eternal excel-
‘ lency, a joy of many generations. Thou
‘ shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles,
‘ and shalt suck the breast of kings, and
‘ thou shalt know that I Jehovah am thy
‘ Saviour, and thy redeemer, the mighty
‘ one of Jacob.’

.. Zeph. iii. 19, 20. ‘ Behold at that time
‘ I will undo all that afflict thee, and will
‘ save her that halteth, and gather her that
‘ was driven out, and I will get them praise
‘ and fame in every land where they have
‘ been put to shame. At that time will I bring
‘ you again, even in the time that I gather
‘ you. For I will make you a name, and
‘ a praise, among all people of the earth,
‘ when I turn back your captivity before
‘ your eyes, saith the Lord.’

Jer. xvi. 14. ‘ Therefore behold the
‘ days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no
‘ more be said, The Lord liveth that brought
‘ up the children of Israel out of the land of
‘ Egypt, but the Lord liveth that brought
‘ up

‘ up the children of Israel from the land of the
‘ north, and from all the lands whither he had
‘ driven them ; and I will bring them again
‘ into their land, which I gave unto their
‘ fathers.’

Jer. xxx. 3. ‘ For lo the days come,
‘ saith the Lord, that I will bring again the
‘ captivity of my people Israel, and Judah,
‘ saith the Lord, and I will cause them to
‘ return to the land that I gave to their fa-
‘ thers, and they shall possess it. Ver. 10,
‘ Therefore fear not, O my servant Jacob,
‘ saith the Lord, neither be dismayed O
‘ Israel ; for lo I will save thee from afar,
‘ and thy seed from the land of their cap-
‘ tivity, and Jacob shall return, and be in
‘ rest and quiet, and none shall make him
‘ afraid. For I am with thee, saith the
‘ Lord, to save thee. Though I make a
‘ full end of all nations whither I have scat-
‘ tered thee, yet will I not make a full end
‘ of thee, but I will correct thee in mea-
‘ sure, and will not leave thee altogether
‘ unpunished.’

Ezek. xxviii. 25. ‘ Thus saith the
‘ Lord God, When I shall have gathered

Q 3

‘ the

‘ the house of Israel from the people among
‘ whom they are scattered, and shall be
‘ sanctified in them, in the sight of the
‘ heathen, then shall they dwell in their
‘ land that I have given to my servant Ja-
‘ cob. And they shall dwell safely therein,
‘ and shall build houses, and plant vine-
‘ yards; yea they shall dwell with confi-
‘ dence, when I have executed judgments
‘ upon all those that despise them round
‘ about; and they shall know that I am
‘ Jehovah their God.’

The change of character that will take place in the Israelites in general, without which they could not be proper objects of the Divine favour, is foretold, and happily expressed, by this prophet, Ch. xxxvi. 25.

‘ For I will take you from among the
‘ Heathen, and gather you out of all coun-
‘ tries, and will bring you into your own
‘ land. Then will I sprinkle clean water
‘ upon you, and ye shall be clean. From all
‘ your filthiness, and from all your idols,
‘ will I cleanse you. A new heart also
‘ will I give you, and a new spirit will I
‘ put within you; and I will take away the
‘ stony

‘ stony heart out of your flesh, and I will
‘ give you a heart of flesh, and I will put
‘ my spirit within you, and cause you to
‘ walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep
‘ my judgments and do them. And ye
‘ shall dwell in the land that I gave to your
‘ fathers, and ye shall be my people, and I
‘ will be your God. Ver. 31, Then shall
‘ ye remember your own evil ways and
‘ your doings that were not good, and shall
‘ loath yourselves in your own sight for
‘ your iniquities, and for your abomina-
‘ tions. Ver. 36, Then the Heathen that
‘ are left round about you shall know that I
‘ the Lord build the ruined places, and plant
‘ that which was desolate. I the Lord have
‘ spoken it. I will do it.’

Ezek. xxxvii. 21, &c. ‘ Thus saith
‘ the Lord God, Behold I will take the
‘ children of Israel from among the Heathen
‘ whither they be gone, and will gather
‘ them on every side, and bring them into
‘ their own land. And I will make them
‘ one nation in the land upon the moun-
‘ tains of Israel, and one king shall be king
‘ to them all, and they shall no more be

Q 4

‘ two

‘ two nations, neither shall they be divided
 ‘ into two kingdoms any more at all. Ver. 26,
 ‘ Moreover I will make a covenant of peace
 ‘ with them. It shall be an everlasting
 ‘ covenant with them, and I will place
 ‘ them, and multiply them, and will set
 ‘ my sanctuary in the midst of them for
 ‘ evermore. My tabernacle also shall be
 ‘ with them; yea I will be their God,
 ‘ and they shall be my people. And the
 ‘ Heathen shall know that I the Lord do
 ‘ sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall
 ‘ be in the midst of them for evermore.’

The prophets from whose writings these extracts are made lived before, or during, the captivity at Babylon; but those whose writings I shall now proceed to quote lived after it. They must therefore refer to some event that was then foreseen, and it is evident that it is future still.

Zech, viii. 13. ‘ And it shall come to
 ‘ pass, that as ye were a curse among the
 ‘ Heathen, O house of Judah, and house
 ‘ of Israel, so will I save you, and ye shall
 ‘ be a blessing. Fear not, but let your
 ‘ hands be strong. For thus saith the
 ‘ Lord

‘ Lord of hosts, As I thought to punish
‘ you when your fathers provoked me to
‘ wrath, saith the Lord of hosts, and I re-
‘ pent not; so again have I thought in
‘ these days to do well unto Jerusalem,
‘ and to the house of Judah. Fear ye
‘ not. Ver. 20, Thus saith the Lord of
‘ hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that
‘ there shall come people, and the inhabi-
‘ tants of many cities. And the inhabi-
‘ tants of one city shall go to another,
‘ saying, Let us go speedily to pray before
‘ the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts.
‘ I will go also. Yea many people, and
‘ strong nations, shall come to seek the
‘ Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray
‘ before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord
‘ of hosts, In those days it shall come to
‘ pass, that ten men out of all languages
‘ of the nations, even shall take hold of the
‘ skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We
‘ will go with you, for we have heard that
‘ “God is with you.”

Zech. xii. 9, 10. ‘ And it shall come to
‘ pass in that day, that I will seek to de-
‘ stroy all the nations that come against
‘ Jerusalem.

‘ of Judah and Jerufalem be pleafant unto
‘ the Lord, as in the days of old, and as
‘ in former years. Ver. 12, And all na-
‘ tions fhall call ye bleffed, for ye fhall
‘ be a delightfulome land, faith the Lord of
‘ hofts.’

With what feelings muft pious Jews, in their present difperfed and oppreffed ftate, meditate on fuch predictions as thefe that I have now read to you; and thefe, I may truly fay, are not perhaps an hundredth part of what their prophets have delivered to them on this fubject. For it is the great burden of all their writings. How muft they be impreffed with the idea of their nation being the chofen people of God, when they can trace their origin (which no other nation is able to do) from the firft of the human race; when they can review all the wonderful difpenfations of providence refpecting them; when they now find themfelves in the very fituation that Mofes predicted more than three thoufand years ago, and therefore cannot entertain a doubt concerning the ftate of high pre-eminence over all other nations, which is
with

with no less clearness promised to them in future time? Can we wonder at the firmness of the faith of the Jews, and at their adherence to their religion, when they are continually reading such prophecies as I have read to you? Can we wonder even at their pride, and undue contempt of all other nations? Who would not be proud of so illustrious a descent, and so glorious a destination as they alone can boast of? How little is the impression that the contempt of the world must have on such a people as this? To them it must be considered as the insolence of beggars to princes in disguise. To correct this pride, the most enlarged views, such as have not yet opened to them, are necessary; viz. that their God is as much the God and the father of all the human race, as he is theirs, and that all pre-eminence, under his government, has for its real object, not the advantage of any part, though seemingly the most favoured, but of the whole of his family; and therefore, though the Israelites will be eminently distinguished and happy, it is only as the means of blessing all

all the race of mankind, far more numerous, and therefore, in the eye of God, far more important than they.

We cannot wonder at the antient prophets, or rather the spirit by which they were inspired, dwelling so much on the subject of the future restoration of the Jews, when we consider that it is the great catastrophe to which tend all the dispensations of Providence, not to the Jews only, but to the whole world; when we consider that, by means of this one chosen nation, all mankind are to be brought to the knowledge, worship, and obedience, of the one true God, and that thus virtue, peace, and happiness, will become universal and uninterrupted.

In attending to the prophecies that I have recited, you must have been particularly struck, as I have been (and not without serious apprehensions for ourselves of this nation) with the plain intimations of the heavy judgments that are denounced against every nation that has oppressed the Jews. For the English in former ages have not been the most favourably disposed

towards this chosen people, but have, in the most barbarous manner, and without the least colour of reason or justice, massacred great numbers of them.

These intimations concerning the fate of the nations who should oppress the Israelites in their dispersion are as old as Moses. Having forewarned his countrymen of the judgments that would befall them in case of disobedience, under the form of *curses*, he says, Deut. xxx. 7. *The Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and upon them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.*

We may say that we, of this generation, have not persecuted the Jews, and that they have no particular reason to complain of *us*. But they were grievously persecuted by the English nation in former times, and have much to complain of *them*; and it is agreeable to the plan of Divine Providence, to punish nations and families as such, though the guilt was contracted in a remote period, and consequently the punishment falls upon the innocent. Of this we have many instances
in

in the scripture history. The judgments pronounced against Jeroboam, Baasha, and Ahab, did not fall upon themselves, but upon their posterity in the fourth generation. Joash, the great grandson of Ahab, was slain in the field of Naboth, as Ahab's own blood was licked by dogs in the same place. The sufferings of the Jews at this day were occasioned by their sins and apostasy in very remote ages.

There are no judgments more distinctly announced than those that are to fall upon the power that is denominated *Babylon*, the *man of sin*, and *antichrist*, which all Protestants interpret, and I doubt not very justly, of the popes and the church of Rome. But whenever those judgments take place, (and the time is perhaps near) it is almost certain that the actual pope, and the court of Rome in general, will be much less deserving of punishment than many preceding popes, and former courts of Rome.

We must be content to wait till the plan of Divine Providence be more clearly unfolded, before we can form any proper judgment concerning it. In time we shall,

I doubt

I doubt not, be convinced that any other mode of proceeding would have been less productive of happiness on the whole. If so, the present measures must be pronounced wise and good; and if *benevolence* be satisfied, *justice* will have no reason to complain.

In the mean time, considering these very imperfect views of things, it becomes us to look principally to our own sentiments and conduct, and to be careful to suppress within ourselves every affection or sentiment that can, directly or indirectly, lead to persecution, whether of Jews or Christians, and to endeavour as far as we can to assist our persecuted brethren, lightening the burdens that are imposed by others. Then, whether we be preserved in general calamities, or be involved in the fate of the guilty, the time will come when a proper distinction will be made between those who now suffer justly, and unjustly. But *if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*

DISCOURSE IX.

Of the Miracles of Jesus.

Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher sent from God: For no man can do those miracles which thou doest, except God be with him.

JOHN iii. 2.

It is not a little remarkable, that from the time of the captivity in Babylon to that of Christ, a period of six hundred years, there did not appear among the Jews any person who pretended to work a miracle; nor was there among them any one who pretended to the gift of prophecy from the time of Malachi, which was about four hundred years before Christ. This is a sufficient proof that the Jews were not a credulous nation. For had they been disposed to believe in miracles, or prophecy, persons enow would have arisen to take advantage

tage of that disposition, as was the case with the Catholics for many centuries. In proportion to the credulity of some, have always been the arts of imposition in others. This remarkable fact demonstrates a general dread in the Jewish nation of assuming the prophetic character without authority. Whatever liberties of other kinds they might take with respect to morality, this species of impiety was not among them.

From these circumstances it may be taken for granted, that pretensions to miracles among Jews were sure of being rigorously scrutinized, so that they would not obtain credit unless the facts were indisputable. This would have been the case had the object of the miracles even been any thing favourable to their religion, and to their wishes; but much more so if it had been any thing that they did not wish to favour. And in this predicament was Jesus when he first assumed the character of a person sent from God, and impowered to work miracles, in proof of his divine mission.

The only person whom the Jews expected in the character of a prophet, preceded by Elijah, they also expected in the character of a king, viz. their promised *Messiah*, the person announced under that title by Daniel, as to *come in the clouds of heaven*, with power and great glory. And it is remarkable that about the time of the appearance of Jesus there was a general expectation of the speedy coming of this Messiah. But they naturally imagined that he would be a great prince, who would rescue their nation from their subjection to the Romans, and bring all the world into subjection to them.

Had any person assumed *this* character, it is not impossible, but that the Jewish nation, prejudiced as they were, might have been disposed to favour his pretensions, and have been less scrupulous in their examination of the proofs of his mission. But Jesus made no such pretensions. He never, indeed, denied that he was the Messiah; but his appearance by no means corresponded to their ideas of him. He did not come in the clouds; and so far was he
from

from assuming kingly power or state, that he was brought up a common carpenter; he chose his companions from persons of an equally low rank with himself; and he declined all particular intercourse with the chiefs of his nation. Besides the meanness of his parentage and education, the place of his nativity (at least that from which he received his denomination) was a despicable town in Galilee, a part of the country which was thought meanly of, compared with Judea properly so called.

The only advantage that Jesus, previous to his appearing in a public character had, was his being announced by John the Baptist as a great prophet, one much greater than himself, and one who would work miracles. For this seems to be implied in his saying that *he would baptize with the Holy Spirit*. This circumstance would, no doubt, excite great attention to Jesus, and a favourable one; and had he appeared in the character that they confidently expected their promised Messiah would assume, he might with somewhat more ease have imposed upon them. But this advantage

tage only respected the common people, who regarded John as a true prophet. By the chief priests and rulers of the nation, to whom John had paid no court, he was regarded in a much less favourable light. Nothing, therefore, that John had said, or done, would dispose them to give Jesus a more favourable reception; but on the contrary would lead them to regard him with a jealous eye. And this jealousy was soon inflamed to hatred and the blackest malignity, though he performed miracles which they could not deny to be such, as soon as he appeared, like John, to pay no court to *them*, but on the contrary openly to expose their hypocrisy and other vices, and to denounce the judgments of God against them. In this state of open opposition to all persons in possession of power, and also to all the learned and most intelligent persons in the country, the conduct of Jesus would, no doubt, be most narrowly watched; and any thing in him looking like artifice could not fail to have been exposed, and he would have been punished as an impostor and a blasphemer.

Notwith-

Notwithstanding these deep-rooted prejudices, and these great disadvantages, the miracles of Jesus were so numerous, and so conspicuous, that no doubt was entertained of them. Great numbers openly avowed themselves to be his disciples, and even received him as their promised Messiah ; and they whose prejudices would not suffer them to acknowledge *this*, did not deny his miracles, but ascribed them to some other cause than the power of God.

Let us, then, consider the circumstances of miracles which produced so wonderful an effect ; and we shall find that, extraordinary as it was, the cause was equal to it. The miracles were so circumstanced, that it was impossible to suspect that there was any imposition in the case. As Nicodemus acknowledged, no man could have done the things that Jesus did, if God had not been with him.

1. The number of the miracles performed by Jesus was beyond all example in any preceding time, even those of Moses and Elijah, if we except the standing miracle of the descent of the manna, which was

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repeated

repeated every day (excepting the sabbath) during forty years. Now an impostor, so narrowly watched as Jesus must have known himself to be, and without assistants, as he must have been at least at the first, would never have attempted so many miracles, from the certainty of his being detected in some of them, though he should have succeeded in others; and a single failure would have been sufficient to expose the whole scheme.

Notwithstanding this, Jesus appears never to have omitted a single opportunity of performing the benevolent miracle of curing diseases of every kind, whoever applied to him for that purpose. With artful management a single person, or a few persons, might appear to be blind, or lame, and suddenly to recover their sight, or the use of their limbs, when commanded so to do; but Jesus made no exception to any kind of disease; and what is much more extraordinary, any *maim*, or the total want of any limb. This was far too bold for the most artful and practised impostor to have undertaken. That so
impudent

impudent an attempt as this should have succeeded, in such peculiarly unfavourable circumstances, and to the extent that all history, and the present state of things, shews that it did succeed, would be a greater miracle than any that are recorded by the evangelists.

It is probable that but few of the miracles performed by Jesus are recorded in the histories we have of him. All the evangelists allude to great numbers not specified by them, and they seem to have selected only the more remarkable of them: yet in the history of little more than one year (for the public ministry of Jesus did not extend beyond this short period) they particularly mention the following, probably only as more distinguished by their circumstances than the rest. Of *lepers*, mention is made of one who met him at the foot of the mountain on which he had delivered the discourse of which we have an account in Matthew and Luke; and of ten who applied to him at the same time, one of whom was a Samaritan. Of a *fever* he cured Peter's wife's mother at Capernaum, and a nobleman's

nobleman's son of the same place, when he was at a distance. Of *blind* men there was one whom he met near Bethsaida; another, who had been blind from his birth, at Jerusalem; and two near to Jericho. Of the *palsy* he cured a centurion's servant at Capernaum before he came to the house. Another paralytic person was brought to him on a bed, and let down through the roof of the house where he was; and one person he cured of a withered hand in a synagogue on the sabbath day.

Of *demoniacs*, or insane persons, he cured one in a synagogue at Capernaum, the miracle which first excited the particular attention of the public to him; another who was raging mad, and wholly intractable, in Gadara; another who, besides being insane, was both blind and dumb, presently after the calling of the twelve apostles. In this case he also relieved the daughter of a Syrophenician woman; and another young person at the foot of the mount of transfiguration. And incidental mention is made of his having cured Mary Magdalene, who had been grievously afflicted in this way,
as

as it is said that *seven demons* had been cast out of her.

He instantly cured a woman who had a bloody issue of many years continuance, as he was going to the house of Jairus in Capernaum; another woman who had been infirm eighteen years in a public synagogue; a lame man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem; one who was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech, on his return from his excursion to the coasts of Tyre and Sydon; a person who had a dropsy at the house of a chief pharisee, Luke xiv. 1. and he cured the wound made by Peter in striking off the ear of the High Priest's servant.

But more astonishing than the cure of any disease was his raising persons from the dead, of whom three are particularly mentioned, viz. the daughter of Jairus at Capernaum, the widow's son at Nain, and Lazarus at Bethany.

Besides these miracles of healing, there were others of a benevolent nature, as his changing a quantity of water into wine at a marriage feast in Cana; and his feeding
first

first five thousand; and afterwards four thousand, with a small quantity of provisions.

All the miracles of Jesus were not, however, of this kind. Some of them seem calculated to shew his power over nature in general, as his stilling a tempest, his walking on the sea, his enabling Peter to do the same, and his causing a barren fig-tree to wither in the course of a night.

Other miracles are recorded in the history of Jesus in which he does not appear to have been the agent, as in the voices from heaven, of which there were three instances; the first at his baptism, probably in the hearing of many persons, when the following words were distinctly pronounced, *This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.* The same words were pronounced on the mount of transfiguration, in the hearing of Peter, James, and John. The last was in the temple, when, in answer to his prayer in which he said, *Father glorify thy name,* the supernatural voice said, *I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.*

Some

Some of the miracles of Jesus, if they may be so called, were of a prophetic nature, as his telling Peter where he should find a large draught of fishes, and a piece of money in a fish's mouth ; his telling his disciples where they should find an ass on which he might ride to Jerusalem, and a person who should shew them a proper place where he might eat his last passover ; but especially his wonderfully exact prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, to take place within that generation. To these may be added his foretelling the powers that would be conferred on his apostles, and their success in preaching the gospel.

All these miracles, however, extraordinary as they are, were as nothing in comparison of the prediction of Jesus concerning his own death, and resurrection, within a limited time, together with his ascension above the clouds, in the presence of a great number of his disciples.

What kind of a man must he have been, to have undertaken all this, in the circumstances in which Jesus was, without any consciousness

consciousness of supernatural assistance, and depending only upon his art and address? Certainly he could not have been in the possession of his right mind, and therefore his impudent pretensions would soon have been exposed, and he would have suffered as an impostor. Let any man at this day, a man the most practised in the arts of imposture, undertake a hundredth part of what Jesus did, and see what would be his fate; and it would have been infinitely more hazardous in the case of Jesus among the Jews.

2. The cures that Jesus undertook to perform, which was always *immediately*, were, in general, of such a nature, that there was the least prospect of present relief, as fevers, palsies, leprosy, dropsy, blindness, and especially insanity. For when these cases are curable by medical treatment, it is always in a course of time, and never suddenly; and in no case was the cure left imperfect, so as to require a second application. Even when the daughter of Jairus was raised to life, she was not left in a languishing condition, so as to require time for her

her perfect recovery, but was immediately capable of eating. The young man whom Jesus restored to life as they were carrying him to his grave, immediately rose up, and he delivered him to his mother; and Lazarus, who had lain in the grave four days, was loosed, and his *being let go* implied his being capable of walking. In all the cases, therefore, the persons were not only recovered from a state of death, but restored to health and vigour.

3. The scale, as I may say, on which several of the miracles of Jesus were performed, was much too large to admit the suspicion of artifice. This more especially applies to the case of feeding the five and the four thousand; and in a great degree to the changing so great a quantity of water, much more than any man could carry, into wine. No impostor would have attempted any thing of the kind. To substitute a single glass of wine for one of water, or as much bread, or any kind of eatable, as a man could carry about him, and for a time conceal, might be practicable. But to provide wine for a large company,

pany, and bread and fish to suffice several thousand persons, and those after they had long fasted, and this in a desert, in the open air, where no such supply could either have been procured, or secreted, was beyond all the power of legerdemain. Besides, it is evident from the whole story, which is related with the most perfect simplicity, that Jesus had no assistants; the apostles themselves having no knowledge of what he intended, and expressing their surprise at his proposal in the most artless manner.

4. It is equally evident that, in the greater part of his miracles, Jesus could not have availed himself of any assistance, and that there could not have been any collusion between him and the persons on whom he operated. The diseased persons were usually presented to him as they happened to come in his way, and the cures were frequently performed in the presence of enemies, who would be attentive, we cannot doubt, to every circumstance that could afford any handle for suspicion.

The man who had been blind from his birth was known to have been so by his
parents,

parents, whose testimony was extorted from them in a court of judicature. Of the ten lepers who were cured at one time, nine did not so much as return to give him thanks; whereas an impostor would, no doubt, have engaged them all, not only to return, but to accompany him in his future progress, as trophies of his power. But in no one instance was this the case with Jesus. In him there was nothing of that ostentation, which is inseparable from the character of an impostor; who would naturally endeavour to make the most of every feat that he could contrive to exhibit with success. The demoniacs that Jesus restored to the use of their understanding had, in general, been long known to all the neighbourhood to have been really insane, and incurably so, especially that in Gadara.

Can it be supposed that the young daughter of Jairus, the widow's son (in a place where Jesus was, to all appearance, a perfect stranger) or Lazarus, who had been in his grave four days, many mourners from Jerusalem, evidently no friends of Jesus, attending all

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the time, only counterfeited death, to favour his views? In the last case Jesus was at a considerable distance when Lazarus died, and the whole history is so circumstantially and naturally related, as to vouch for its own truth. Besides, in the presence of so many enemies, what could the assistance of his apostles, had they been on the spot from the beginning, have availed

him?

How could Jesus have contrived, by the assistance, to produce a voice that should appear to come from heaven, with the farther appearance of the heavens opening, and something lighting upon his head. And, though on one of the occasions of a voice from heaven, Jesus was in the temple, it could not, at the most, have been more than under a portico; and as the place was always crowded, and the different apartments above him, or any where else, were not at his disposal, any attempt at an imposition in such a place as this, must have been desperate in the extreme.

But that there was no collusion between Jesus and the apostles, is most evident from the

the history of Judas, who betrayed him to his enemies. If there had been any collusion, he must have been privy to it, or have seen reason to suspect it; for, as far as appears, he had the same opportunity of knowing the secrets of the little fraternity as any other of the company, and yet he not only acknowledged the perfect innocence of Jesus, but, from remorse for what he had done, went and hanged himself.

5. With respect to many of the miracles of Jesus, it is evident that no human assistance could have availed him at all, as in stilling the tempest, walking on the sea, and causing the barren fig-tree to wither in a night. No knowledge that we *now* have of the powers of nature could encourage any person to attempt any thing of the kind, especially the two first.

It may, indeed, be said that the man with his ass, or with the pitcher of water, might have been in the places where the disciples would find them by particular appointment; but this could not have been the case with the fish that had the piece of

money in his mouth. And how could Jesus have so peremptorily foretold Peter's denial of him, contrary to his own fixed resolution? Will any one say that when the lives of both were in such imminent danger, they had agreed to say, and do, what they did? But more especially, by what human means of any kind could Jesus have been enabled to foretel so particularly as he did the fate of Judea, Jerusalem, and the temple, forty years before the event, when no other person had any apprehensions of the kind. The modern Jews pretend that he did it by his interpretation of the prophecy of Daniel. But how came Jesus to be more sagacious in the interpretation of prophecy than even the most learned Jews, the scribes and Pharisees of his time?

I shall now make a few observations of a more general nature on the improbability of such men as Jesus, and his first followers, being impostors. If we only consider their condition, and education, we may be convinced that they were by no means likely to come within the influence of such *ambition,*

bition, as would have been necessary to their undertaking so complicated a piece of imposture as they are charged with. They were, with few exceptions, and those not of the most conspicuous among them, men of low and laborious, though not of ignoble, occupations. Also the youngest of them was probably turned thirty, which was the case of Jesus himself. Peter, who took the lead among them, was probably much older. Consequently, they were men who had acquired habits of industry. They had also some little property, for they could make a merit of abandoning it when they became the followers of Jesus, and they were evidently sober and pious men. They were men who had had no commerce with the more elevated and splendid part of the world, so as to be fascinated by its charms, nor were they instigated to make desperate attempts to repair ruined fortunes, which is the case with most adventurers.

Neither Jesus, nor any of his associates, had any more knowledge of nature, or philosophy, than their neighbours; nor were

they men of superior ability; and from their ignorance of the world they were little likely to think of ever going beyond the bounds of their own country. What figure could a carpenter, followed by fishermen, or husbandmen, expect to make even in Jerusalem, and much less in the principal cities of the Roman empire, where after the death of Jesus we chiefly find them, such as Antioch, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, and Rome itself?

For men in their originally low situation and scanty knowledge, and who, as Jews, could not but know that they laboured under greater disadvantage than persons of any other nation, to entertain the idea of making such a revolution in the world as they actually effected, and which they would soon find could not take place to any purpose till long after their deaths, must have been insanity in the extreme. It was to undertake to do, without superior ability or superior means, what the greatest philosophers in the most learned nations had not attempted; viz. to persuade men to abandon the rites of their religion, absurd indeed,

indeed, but what they had received from their ancestors, and which had been derived to them from the most remote antiquity, and on the observance of which they imagined the prosperity of their several states depended. The scheme of persuading even their countrymen to abandon the flattering idea of a conquering Messiah, an idea which it is evident the apostles themselves did not give up without the greatest reluctance, was sufficiently extravagant, without looking any farther; and yet Jesus himself, a working carpenter, as no doubt he was, must have originally formed these great ideas.

That Jesus was not a man of much acquired knowledge is certain, and that he had any extraordinary share of natural sagacity, or ability, does not appear. In curing diseases he did not pretend to understand more of the nature and causes of them than any other person. This applies to the case of demoniacs, as well as any other. And his language shews that he was under the same mistake with respect to this disease as the rest of his country-

men, supposing insane persons to be really possessed by dæmons.

That such men as the apostles, on seeing a man work miracles, and especially a man of exemplary piety and goodness, as Jesus was, and then entertain an idea that he was the Messiah their nation expected, and that, on being called upon to attend him constantly, they should imagine that some great thing was intended for them in his kingdom, and be induced to leave their low occupations with a view to such advancement, is perfectly natural. No man is wholly without the desire of bettering his condition, when he has a fair and reasonable prospect of doing it; and here piety and ambition would unite to make them become the followers of Jesus.

But that such plain men as these should enter into a league with a man no way superior to themselves, that they should either be deceived by him, or join with him in a scheme to deceive the world, and with the poor chance of succeeding in this abandon the employments by which they had long subsisted, and for persons in their condition

condition reputably, to the age of about forty; that they should agree to make him their head, and implicitly act by his orders; that when he was cut off by an ignominious death, they should pretend that he rose from the dead, and even still continue to act as by his instructions, and persist in this scheme without any consciousness of superior powers, and without any resource but in their own artifices, through the whole of a painful life, and many of them die in torment, without the rest being at all discouraged, and without confessing the imposture, exceeds any thing that we read of insanity in the history of mankind. And that such men as these should eventually succeed in their wild scheme, is altogether incredible. When we see not only undertaken, but actually carried into execution, things evidently above the power of the visible agents, it is natural, and philosophical, to attribute the effect to invisible agents. If the powers of *man* be unequal to the effect, we must have recourse to powers *superhuman*. For every effect must have an adequate cause.

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In fact, that such men as Jesus and the apostles should either form such a scheme as that of the *regeneration of the world* (for Christianity pretends to nothing less) when it required ages to effect it, and should finally succeed in it, notwithstanding all the obstacles that lay in their way, is something more extraordinary, more out of the course of nature, and therefore more properly miraculous, than any thing recorded in the gospels, and consequently less credible.

If we consider the first disciples of Jesus as *writers*, their conduct will appear as unaccountable as when they are considered as engaged in a scheme by which they could have so little prospect of imposing upon the world, and with a certainty, as they would soon find, of meeting with every kind of ill usage, and frequently dying a violent death.

They were not men of education, and probably had read nothing besides the sacred books of the Jews. Consequently, if they be supposed to have been persons who formed to themselves the idea of the character

rafter and history of Jesus as a prophet, they would, no doubt, have made it to resemble that of their antient prophets, for they had no other models to follow; and if they had meant to recommend their work to Jews, no other would have appeared likely to answer their purpose. Now, all the antient prophets bore a great resemblance to each other, and John the Baptist very much resembled them, in that austerity which was common to them all; and this circumstance, no doubt, contributed to his good reception among his countrymen.

But the character of Jesus was a great original, exceedingly different from that of any former prophet. His general manners were pleasing, he easily mixed with the world, and occasionally partook of its enjoyments. This so much offended his countrymen, that they reproached him with it. Was this, then, a circumstance that an inventor would have adopted with a view to recommend the character to *Jews?*

Jesus's manner of discoursing and working miracles were in many respects new.

Parables

Parables are not frequent in the old Testament; but they constitute a great part of the discourses of Jesus. Preceding prophets worked miracles but rarely, on particular occasions, and often with great preparation. But they occur so frequently in the history of Jesus, though a history of little more than a year, that, with respect to number, they were probably equal to all that had been performed before from the beginning of the world. His manner also of working miracles was peculiar to himself. It seemed as if they were actually within his own power, though it sufficiently appears, both by his declarations, and his manner occasionally, that the power by which they were performed was not his own.

In other respects also the character and manner of Jesus were so different from those of any of the preceding Jewish prophets, that they who were not writers by profession, and had no other models to follow, cannot be supposed to have thought of it. Had their view been to impose on the Jews a *Messiah*, and not merely a prophet,

phet, they were still more unfortunate. For certainly no Jew ever formed such an idea of their Messiah as the evangelists have exhibited.

But it is evident from the bare perusal of the gospels, that the evangelists were no inventors, or capable of being so. They merely relate what they had seen and heard, and this they do without the least ornament, or ostentation; contenting themselves with relating facts, and leaving it to others to draw conclusions, and characters from them. No other books bear so many unequivocal marks of being genuine narratives of facts, or carry so much of their own evidence along with them.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE X.

Of the Miracles of the Apostles.

And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles.

ACTS ii. 43.

WE have seen how the age of miracles, which ceased at the Babylonish captivity, was, after an interruption of six hundred years (in which we find no pretension to any such thing) revived by Jesus, in circumstances in which it was absolutely impossible for him, or for any man, to have imposed upon those before whom they were exhibited.

We have seen how a man of no higher rank than a common carpenter, with fishermen, and other persons of no greater estimation, for his companions, with the

jealousy and hatred of all persons in power, or eminent for knowledge, to contend with, went about publicly curing all sick persons, under whatever disease they laboured, even insanity, whenever they presented themselves; raising several persons from the dead, and performing various other miracles, of the most astonishing kind; such as twice feeding a great multitude with a small quantity of provisions, stilling a tempest, and walking on the sea. His divine mission was also attested by voices from heaven, but more especially by his resurrection from the dead, after a public crucifixion, and in such other circumstances with respect to its credibility, that it does not seem possible to imagine any others which could have so effectually ensured the belief of it in distant ages.

So important, however, in the eye of Providence, was the credibility of the gospel history, in all future ages, that the scene of miracles was not closed with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The same spirit, or power, by which Jesus worked miracles

miracles was transferred to the apostles, and other disciples of Jesus, and continued with them, as far as appears, through life, though it probably terminated with that generation. This *effusion of the spirit*, as it may be called, was promised by Jesus to his apostles, when he assured them, John xiv. 12, that after he should leave them they should do even greater things than he had done ; and before his ascension he directed them to wait in Jerusalem till they should be endued with power from on high. This promise began to be fulfilled on the following Pentecost, about ten days after his ascension.

On the death of Jesus all his disciples were, as might have been expected, from their having no idea of any such event, thrown into the greatest consternation, and dispersed. Believing him to be the Messiah, they had flattered themselves that he would, at a proper time, assume what they took to be the proper character of that high office, and appear as a king. But on his death all their hopes were blasted, nor can it be imagined, on any principles consistent

sistent with our knowledge of human nature, that they would ever have appeared in public, avowing themselves to be his disciples, and acting as by authority from him, and continue to do so through life, in the face of danger and of death, unless they had been fully persuaded of the truth of his resurrection, and had actually received the powers that had been promised them; and with respect to neither of them could they have been deceived themselves. But with this supposition, their conduct, and all the following history of the planting of Christianity, is perfectly consistent. For they acted as men naturally would do in those new and peculiar circumstances.

As the history of this period is of infinite importance, it behoves us to give the closest attention to it. Though we are not in the situation of the first disciples of Jesus, exposed to persecution and death for our faith in his mission, it behoves us, as men pretending to reason, and especially with respect to religion (on which so much of our present enjoyment, as well as our

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future prospects, depends) not to be imposed upon by fables instead of true history, by tricks of legerdemain instead of real miracles, and by the artifices of man instead of the power of God. I shall, therefore, bring into review the particulars of the great scene that opened on the world after the death and supposed resurrection of Jesus, that we may see whether the facts correspond with the supposition of the reality of that resurrection, or not; taking it for granted that human nature was the same then that it is now, and that both they who preached Christianity, and they to whom it was preached, were *men*, as we are.

Had the apostles been men who knew that Jesus had been a mere impostor, and had chosen (for any reason that we cannot well imagine) to carry on the same imposture and act in his name, rather than in their own; and had they been acquainted with his arts, it is most probable that they would, at least have begun with attempting something of the same kind. But the first extraordinary narrative in their history

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is of something quite unlike any thing that we find in the history of Jesus, and what nothing they had seen of him, or, could have learned of him, could have led them to conceive; and yet, had it been an imposition, it was the boldest that ever was thought of by the most practised cheats, and, in their circumstances, the most unlikely to succeed.

The apostles, and other disciples of Jesus, were well known to be men in the lowest ranks of life, wholly unlearned, and acquainted with no language besides their own. Of this there never was a question; and yet when they were assembled together on the day of Pentecost, after *a sound as from heaven, a rushing mighty wind,* and the appearance of *flames of fire* on the heads of all the company, circumstances which it was impossible for them to have produced by art, they all began to speak distinctly and intelligibly in various languages, many of which had no affinity to each other; and yet they were perfectly understood by the natives of all those countries who were present. The amazement

of these persons, who had resorted to Jerusalem from the most distant parts of the world, is expressed in the most natural manner. Acts ii. 5, *There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded; because every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold are not all these that speak Galileans? and how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born, Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians; we do hear them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?*

Now I do not think it is possible to imagine any fact more decisively miraculous than

than this. Had it been only one foreign language that these men had undertaken to speak so suddenly, it might have been possible that, having prepared themselves beforehand, and assisted one another, they might, in some measure, have succeeded. But the scale on which this miracle was performed was much too great for the purpose of imposture. For by one or other of the company every known language was spoken, and persons to whom the languages were native were the judges of their speaking them correctly, and by no means predisposed to make a report in favour of the speakers.

The effect corresponded to this wonderful event. Had there been any trick in it, it would soon have been exposed. But some, who understood not the languages, saying that those who spake them were drunk, Peter addressed them in so forcible a manner on the subject of the death and resurrection of Jesus, of which all the company present declared themselves witnesses, that three thousand persons immediately avowed themselves

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converts,

converts, and were baptized. The manner in which Peter spake concerning Jesus, and his miracles, the particulars of which he had no occasion to enumerate, or to bring any proof of, as being well known to all present, is remakable, and such as no impostor would have ventured upon. Acts ii. 22, *Ye men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*

Was it possible to have made so many converts, if either the fact of speaking with unknown tongues; or the miracles of Jesus, so confidently appealed to, could have been disputed? And the effect of this address upon the people in general, who did not chuse to be baptized, and thus publicly join themselves to the society of Christians, corresponded to the truth of it.

it. Ver. 43, *Fear came upon every soul.* As to the faith of the professed disciples, who were greatly increased, it appeared by its fruits to be of the firmest kind. Ver. 41, *Then they that gladly received the word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And they that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every one had need. And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God; and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

Such was the great and singular miracle by which the truth of Christianity was first attested, after the ascension of Jesus; and this species of miracle was not confined to this memorable day, but continued to be a standing miracle in the Christian church,

probably during the life-time of the apostles ; so that there was sufficient opportunity of examining the reality of it. It was, by way of eminence, denominated *the gift of the spirit*, and was always conferred on the disciples by the laying on of the hands of the apostles ; being the only miracle that may be said to have been, in a manner, in their own power. The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, speaks of it as well known to, and seemingly experienced by, most of them ; as exercised

in his absence, and a great cause of ostentation with many of them. Writing to the Galatians, Ch. iii. 2, he appeals to this gift of the spirit as given to them in consequence of the preaching of the gospel, and not any thing that they derived from their observance of the law of Moses. And yet, both in the Corinthian Church, and among the Galatians, there were many who undervalued this apostle, and who were desirous to set up themselves and others above him. Would he then have dared to appeal, in his vindication, to a fact
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that was known to have no foundation? It is what no man in his senses would have done.

The history of the promulgation of Christianity by the apostles does not appear to be so crowded with miracles as that of Jesus, if we except the above-mentioned standing miracle of the gift of tongues, which seems to have been imparted to almost all the converts. But the public ministry of Jesus was of a short duration, and that of the apostles was of many years continuance. It is probable, also, that, as was the case with respect to Jesus, only the more remarkable of the cases are recorded. But these deserve particular attention, being such as no impostors would have ventured upon, especially the first, Ch. iii. 2, which was the instantaneous and perfect cure of a man who had been lame from his birth, and who was then forty years old. It is probable, also, that he had been the greatest part of his life accustomed to beg at the gate of the temple, so that no case of real and incurable

curable lameness could well have been better known.

When this man asked alms of Peter and John, as he did of others, when they were

about to go into the temple, Peter, no doubt feeling a divine impulse, said to him, *Acts iii. 6, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk, and taking him by the hand, he instantly leaped up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, leaping, and walking, and praising God. And this in the presence of a great crowd of people.*

Such an event as this naturally brought together a great concourse of people; and Peter took the opportunity of addressing them, as before, on the subject of the death of Jesus and his resurrection, of which he again declared himself and his associates to be witnesses; and said that it was not by any virtue or power of their own, but by faith in him, that this miracle had been performed. He farther assured them that, though Jesus was ascended into heaven, he would
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return at the time of the restitution of all things, spoken of by the prophets.

This miracle, followed by this proper address, produced a great addition to the number of professed disciples, who now amounted to five thousand men. What put the reality of the miracle past all dispute, was the behaviour of the great council of the nation upon this occasion. For Peter and John being called to appear before them, for preaching in so public a manner, they boldly declared, that the miracle was performed in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead ; and the man who had been lame being present, they had nothing to reply. They therefore contented themselves with threatening them, and charging them not to preach any more in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John openly refused to obey such an order, declaring that they would obey God rather than man. The embarrassment, and the whole conduct of these magistrates can only be accounted for by supposing the truth of the fact.

fact. The story is also told with the greatest simplicity. Acts iv. 13. *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man who was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside, out of the council, they conferred among themselves; saying, What shall we do to these men; for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no farther among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth no more in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor preach, in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you, rather than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding*

finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people; for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. This public miracle was more than any other in proof of the divine mission and resurrection of Jesus; and nothing could have been more unexceptionable and decisive.

The presence of God with the apostles was awfully witnessed in the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, who would have imposed upon them with respect to the price of a possession which they had sold, and pretended to have wholly given to the common stock of the church. Upon this it is said, Acts v. 12, *By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people, insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits, and they were healed every one.*

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Upon this the high-priest, and the rulers of the nation, were, as might have been expected, more exasperated than ever; and still hoping to subdue them by terror, they put them in prison, Acts v. 18; but in the night they were miraculously set at liberty; and when they were sent for to appear before the council, the judges were informed that they were teaching in the temple. And the officers who had been sent to conduct them into the court said, Ver. 23, *The prison truly found we shut with all safety, but when we had opened we found no man within. And presently other persons came, and said, Behold the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.*

The magistrates being utterly confounded at this, and not knowing what farther to do, contented themselves with threatening them as before, and charging them not to preach any more to the people. But Peter and the other apostles, having these evident tokens of the presence of God with them, answered as before, and said, Ver. 29, *We ought to obey God rather than man.*

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They also boldly repeated their testimony to the divine mission and resurrection of Jesus.

After this these magistrates thought to put the apostles to death, as they had done Jesus ; but, in consequence of the prudent advice of Gamaliel, one of their body, they only ordered them to be beaten, and again charged them to preach no more in the name of Jesus. This, however, was far from having the intended effect. For we read, Ver. 41, that *they departed from the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ.* What do we see in this conduct, both of the apostles, and of the rulers of the nation, but the clearest evidence of the truth of the apostles doctrine, and the impotence of civil power to prevent the effect of it ?

I intend not to dwell on other miracles, as the cure of Æneas, and the raising from death of Tabitha by Peter, his second miraculous deliverance from prison, where he

was confined by Herod ; or many that occur in the history of Paul, as, though all tending, in a general way, to shew the presence of a divine power with the apostles, they had only local effects. But the circumstances attending the conversion of Paul himself are deserving of very particular notice.

It has often been said by unbelievers, that the truth of the facts on which Christianity is founded is not attested by unbelieving Jews or Heathens. But it has appeared that the facts were not denied by the most inveterate enemies of Christianity in this early age, not even by the Jewish rulers, who persecuted the apostles, and would have put them to death. Besides, an enemy converted by being convinced of the truth of the facts, and ascribing them to their proper cause, becomes of course a Christian, and a friend. And the strongest attestation that can be given is that of one who, from having been a violent enemy, becomes a friend by this fair means ; and such was the case of Paul.

Had the Jewish rulers, and other the
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most inveterate enemies of Christianity, been assembled, and have put their conviction of the truth of it upon the conversion of any one man whatever, of their own body, and acting by their direction, it would probably have been Paul, who was a most bigoted Jew, a Pharisee, and a most open enemy of the Christian name. It was probably he who procured the death of Stephen, as he is said to have *consented to his death*, and to have *kept the clothes of them that stoned him*. It is farther said of him, Acts viii. 3, that *he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and baling men and women committed them to prison; so that the disciples were scattered abroad, and went to preach in distant places*. But even thus they did not escape his pursuit. We read, Ch. ix. 1, that *breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples, he, of his own accord, went unto the high-priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogue; that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem*.

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The conversion, therefore, of such a man as this, was the greatest and the clearest triumph that the Christian cause could have. His passions, and no doubt his interest too, impelled him to persist in his violence. And having, no doubt, heard all that had been alleged by the apostles, and other Christians, it was not easy to say what could give his mind a different impression. And yet this was effected, and though suddenly, so effectually, that he ever after promoted the cause of Christianity with as much zeal as ever he had persecuted it. Nay, he bore every kind of persecution himself about thirty years, and at length died a martyr to his new principles. His motive to this could not have been either interest or reputation. For the Christians had nothing to bribe him with, and the Christian cause at that time was in no degree of estimation with any person whose good opinion he would naturally wish to engage. On the contrary, Christianity was from the first, and long after, *a sect every where spoken against*. Nothing, therefore, remained to make any impression

impression upon his mind, but some miracle; and such he says, in his repeated account of his conversion, was the true cause of it.

As he was going to Damascus, in company with others, who, no doubt, went in order to assist him, and forward his scheme of persecuting the Christians whom he should find in that city, he was suddenly struck to the ground, and rendered blind, by a light from heaven, and immediately afterwards addressed by Jesus himself, who bade him proceed to Damascus, and said that he would there be informed what he should do.

This was not a vision, in the night, or any thing that passed when he was alone, and therefore subject to illusion, but in mid-day, and in the company of his friends; and neither himself nor they appear to have had any mistrust or misgiving about the business they went upon. His companions also heard the sound of the voice, but did not distinguish the articulation.

In this state of blindness Paul continued three days, and then a Christian, named Ananias, was directed by Jesus to go to him, being assured that he had had a vision in which he (i. e. Ananias) came, and putting his hands upon him, caused him to receive his sight. After some objection on the part of Ananias, on account of the well known principles and conduct of Paul, he went to him; when his sight was restored, and he was baptized. As soon as he was recovered he began to preach in the name of Christ, made many converts, and devoted his whole life to it. And in this he was remarkably successful.

After this great miracle, of the conversion of Paul himself, the miracles performed by him are comparatively of little moment, as the striking of Elymas blind in the presence of the governor of Cyprus, in consequence of which the governor was converted; his healing a cripple at the gate of Lystra, which led the people of that place to imagine that he was one of the gods in the form of man; his casting out a spirit of divination from a woman at Philippi;

Philippi; his many miracles, and especially casting out demons, at Ephesus; his raising Eutychus to life, and his curing the father of Publius the governor of Malta, and others in that island; and himself receiving no harm from the bite of a viper in that place.

The credibility of these miracles depends in part upon the testimony of the relater, who appears in many of them to have been an eye witness, but principally upon the indisputable effects of Paul's preaching, as he founded several Christian churches in the places in which the miracles are said to have been performed; which could not have been the case if the facts had not been true; the account of these transactions being published, and read in all Christian churches, while the events were recent; the continuance and flourishing state of these churches, and their constant use of this book, as well as others of the New Testament, are sufficient vouchers for their truth.

That there was something very extraordinary in the miracles of the apostles, and

superior to any arts, or tricks, that were known to those who were the most practised in those things at that time, appears from the conversion, or pretended conversion, of Simon of Samaria, commonly called Simon Magus. This Simon is said, Acts viii. 9, to have been a person *who before time used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that he himself was some great one; to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of a long time he had bewitched them with his sorceries.* Yet this Simon wondered, beholding the miracles that were done by Philip, declared himself a Christian, and was baptized. And seeing that the Holy Spirit, or the gift of speaking in unknown tongues, was conferred by the laying on of the hands of Peter, he offered him money to obtain the same power; thinking that it was the necessary consequence of some particular secret, with which he was not acquainted, and which he had no means of discovering. But Peter, with just indignation, replied, *Thy money*

money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

The extraordinary nature of the miracles wrought by Paul was equally evident from the conduct of some Jews, who pretended to exorcism at Ephesus. Seeing demons cast out by Paul in the name of Jesus, they thought to do the same by merely using the same words ; saying to a demoniac, Acts xix. 13, *We adjure thee by Jesus whom Paul preaches.* But though they could use the words, they soon found that they were not accompanied with the same power. For the demoniac answered, Ver. 15, *Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye ? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house, naked and wounded.* And this was known to all the Jews, and Greeks also, dwelling at Ephesus. And fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Could there have been a clearer confession, and from enemies, who themselves pretended to ex-

traordinary arts, that what was done by the apostles exceeded any powers that they were acquainted with. And yet the apostles had had no education, or instruction, that could have given them this superiority. This too was the confession of the Egyptian magicians, that the miracles of Moses were performed *by the finger of God*, whereas what *they* did was something of a different kind.

The history of the conversion of Cornelius, the first Gentile Christian, is particularly worthy of attention, especially with respect to the correspondence between the visions of Cornelius and of Peter, the one at Cæsarea, and the other at Joppa. But as it does not immediately relate to the evidence of Christianity in general, so much as to the circumstance of extending the benefits of it to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, I do not enlarge upon it. But the manner in which Peter addressed Cornelius, and his friends on that occasion, is much to my purpose, as it shews the notoriety of the great facts on which the truth of Christianity is founded. Acts x. 36, *The word*

word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ; that word ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached. He had no occasion to direct them to any evidence with which they were not acquainted. He took it for granted that no person could be ignorant of the facts, or require any proof of them. Paul also supposed the same in his address to Agrippa. Acts xxvi. 26, For the king knoweth of those things, before whom also I speak freely. For I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him. For this thing was not done in a corner.

It pleased God that this exhibition of miracles should be confined to the age of the apostles, and be instrumental in the planting of Christianity. For this important purpose they were necessary. Otherwise the testimony of the apostles, and others, to the resurrection of Jesus, might not have been sufficient to insure the credibility of so very extraordinary a thing to future ages. But the evidence of the numerous

merous miracles performed by the apostles, added to those performed by Christ, certified by common human testimony, is abundantly sufficient for the purpose. For what can any reasonable man, who must be sensible of the inconvenience of the course of nature being perpetually violated (as it must be if every man should be gratified with the sight of miracles) require farther, than that a sufficient number of persons, constituted of course as they themselves are, should have had every motive to in-

quire into the truth of the facts, and have been fully satisfied with respect to them. For then he could not but be convinced, that if he himself had been in their situation, he would have been satisfied as well as they. Nay the conviction that such a number of persons, in the circumstances of the apostles and other primitive Christians, that real miracles were performed, in attestation of the facts in the gospel history, is even more satisfactory than any that could have been exhibited to himself; because he might say, that his senses, or his ignorance, might be imposed upon, through some affection peculiar

peculiar to himself; but that so many thousand persons, as good judges as himself, and as much interested in the discovery of the truth as he could have been, could not have been imposed upon, without a much greater miracle than any of those to which they gave their assent.

On this firm basis, my Christian brethren, stands our faith; and surely it stands upon a rock. It only requires an unbiaſſed mind, and eſpecially a freedom from thoſe vicious diſpoſitions and purſuits which chiefly indiſpoſe men to the duties enjoined by the goſpel, to perceive its evidence, and embrace it with joy.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XI.

On the Resurrection of Jesus.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

1 COR. XV. 20.

WE cannot imagine any question more interesting to man, than whether he shall survive the grave, so that he shall live, and especially live for ever, after he has been dead. Every question relating to our condition *here* is of no moment at all when compared to *this*.

Nothing that we see in nature can lead us to form any such expectation. I say *expectation*. For though some appearances may lead us to indulge a *wish*, and in some persons perhaps encourage a *hope*, of another life after this, yet if we were left to the mere light of nature, it would remain improbable upon the whole; so that we
could

could not, in this situation, die with any reasonable prospect of living again.

The constitution of man very much resembles that of other animals. They have the same senses of body, and the same faculties of mind, differing from us only in *degree*; man being more intelligent than they, and therefore capable of greater refinement in his passions and affections, and having greater comprehension of mind, so as to take into his view more of the past, and of the future, together with the present, than they can. This, however, amounts to no difference in *kind*; and the difference that we see among other animals in these respects, is as great as that which subsists between us and the highest of them; the oyster, for example, and the elephant. Consequently, it would be natural to conclude that one fate awaits us all, the superior kinds of animals as well as the inferior, and man as well as them all. When we die, we are equally subject to corruption, and a total dissolution of the parts of which we consist, without any appearance of their ever being re-assembled, and re-arranged as
they

they were before, or of any other Being, in a new form, resulting from them. Death is a great veil, which no man can draw aside, and beyond which all is darkness.

But were it possible, by the force of any reasoning, to discover the *probability* of a future state (and few persons will pretend that they can, by the light of nature, arrive at *certainty* with respect to it) the reasons, whatever they were, that made so great an event probable to one, might give no satisfaction to another.

Besides, the magnitude of the question is such, and the interest we have in the solution of it is so great, that nothing but the strongest and clearest evidence could give general satisfaction with respect to it. Nothing less than a positive assurance from our Maker himself could answer this purpose. And this (which if any thing could be said to require it, did so) revelation informs us has been given, and in such a manner as must give entire satisfaction to every unprejudiced mind, *life and immortality being fully brought to light by the gospel*, as I hope to evince in the prosecution of this discourse.

It could not be expected that the Divine Being should give this assurance to every individual of the human race. It would be sufficient if it was given to some, to be communicated, with proper evidence of the fact, to others; and unless the communication was made to every person, this is all that could be done in the case. For this truth is of such a nature as to be incapable of strict, or mathematical, demonstration, such as that of *twice two making four*, but only of such proof as *historical facts* are capable of. But the evidence of a future state should not be undervalued on that account; because there are no kinds of truth of which we have a more firm persuasion than of those of the historical kind; as for example, that such a person as Julius Cæsar once lived at Rome, and that there exists at present such a city as Constantinople. What propositions do we believe more firmly than we do these? Now if our faith in a future life can be shewn to be as well founded as these are, it is quite sufficient for the purpose; because it will be a faith that men will not scruple to *act* upon. They would then live

as expectants of immortality, and would do nothing that should imply a doubt of a future state. That is, they would lead virtuous lives, which is the end of all religion.

In what manner God was pleased to impart to mankind the first information concerning a future life we are not now acquainted, as we have no account of it in the writings of Moses, or in any other writings now extant. But we see the *effect* of it in the Jews, who to this day are all firm believers in it; and, with a few exceptions, appear always to have believed in it. We may, therefore, presume that, in some period of time past, mankind, or at least the ancestors of that nation, had satisfactory evidence of the Divine Being having given them this assurance. Because it is an idea that we cannot well suppose would ever have occurred to men themselves.

That there may be something in man that continues to exist, notwithstanding the change that takes place in him at death, *may* be imagined. But, upon that principle, man could not properly be said to *die* at all.

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He only continues to exist in some other form or manner. But that man should really *die*, and after continuing in a state of death, come to life again at a future period, that is, that there should be a proper *resurrection of the dead*, which is the faith of the Jews and Christians (being, I must now presume, the clear doctrine of both the Old and the New Testament) I will venture to say must ever have appeared in the highest degree improbable, and therefore incredible. Nothing but the express assurance of the great Being who made men could have satisfied them that he would revive them in those circumstances.

The original record of the communication of this most important truth having been lost, it pleased the Divine Being to renew it by Jesus Christ, the founder of our religion; who not only asserted the doctrine, as from God, and confirmed it by miracles, or such works as no man could have done if God had not been with him; but who himself actually died and rose again, as a proof of the reality of the thing. And this seems to have been all the evi-

dence that mankind could have asked, if the most intelligent, and the most incredulous of them, had been required to say what would satisfy them.

As Jesus rested the evidence of his divine mission, and consequently his authority to preach the doctrine of a future life, in a more particular manner upon his own resurrection from the dead ; and as, in all cases, examples have the greatest weight with mankind, I shall confine myself at this time to the consideration of the circumstances of his death and resurrection, shewing them to have been such as render those important events in the highest degree credible, both at the time when they took place ; and, which is of much more consequence, in all future time. So that, had mankind, not only in that period, but in the most distant ages, been required to name the evidence that would give them the most satisfaction, it will appear that it has been given them ; and that, in any other circumstances than the actual ones, the events would have appeared less credible than they do at present.

I shall

I shall first consider the circumstances which tend to give peculiar strength to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, and then reply to some objections which have been made to it. After this I shall shew that this historical evidence of the truth of *revealed religion* proves the truth of *natural religion*, and conclude with a practical application of the doctrine.

In the first place I shall consider the circumstances which give peculiar strength to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

1. His death was not private, among his friends, but in public, and accomplished by his enemies, who, we may be sure, would not leave their own great purpose unfinished, when it was in their power completely to effect it. This we cannot doubt to have been the principal reason, in the plan of divine providence, why Jesus was executed as a criminal, in consequence of the sentence of a public court of justice. After this, no reasonable doubt could be entertained of the reality of his death. Accordingly, it does not appear that any doubt was entertained of it at the time, by those

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who

who were the best judges, and who were, at the same time, the most interested to dispute the fact. And this is all that we can reasonably require at this day.

It is true that Jesus expired sooner than other persons usually did in the same circumstances. But this might be owing to his having a more delicate constitution, and especially to his having been so much exhausted by his severe agony in the garden the preceding night; an agony which affected him so much that it would not have been extraordinary if he had actually died in consequence of it: since such consternation and terror as he appears to have been in is well known to have been, of itself, the cause of death to many persons.

The death of Jesus was so evident to the soldiers who attended the execution, and who, no doubt (being used to the business) were sufficient judges of the signs of death, that, concluding him to be actually dead, they did not break his bones, as they did those of the other persons who were executed along with him. One of them, however, did what was fully equivalent to it;

it; for he thrust a spear into his side, so that blood and water evidently flowed out of the wound. Now though we may be at a loss to account for the *water*, it was certainly impossible so to pierce the body as that *blood* should visibly, and instantly, flow from the wound, without piercing either the heart itself, or some large blood vessel, the rupture of which would have been mortal.

After this, Jesus was taken down from the cross, was swathed in spices, as the bodies of persons of distinction among the Jews usually were, was left in that state, without any appearance of life, and deposited in a cold sepulchre, where he could have no assistance to bring him to life if any remains of life had been in him. Can we then have any doubt of Jesus having been unquestionably dead, when both friends and enemies had no doubt at the time on the subject?

2. The circumstances of the re-appearing of Jesus after his crucifixion were such, as were calculated to give the greatest satisfaction possible. The first of them were

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made

made when, it is evident, his disciples had no expectation whatever of any such event, so that they could not have been imposed upon by their fond imaginations. For though Jesus had plainly apprised his disciples that he was to be put to death, and that he should rise again on the third day, they had so fixed a persuasion that he was to be a great king, and consequently not to die at all, that they probably concluded (as he had been used to speak to them in figurative language) that by *death* he only meant some trial, or calamity, and that therefore by a *resurrection* he meant his emerging from it. But whatever their ideas were, it is most evident from the history that they had no expectation either of his death, or of his resurrection, and that his death only filled them with consternation and despair, and did not at all lead them to expect his resurrection.

After Jesus had appeared in this unexpected manner to several of his disciples, viz. to Mary Magdalene, to the two disciples walking to Emmaus, to the ten who were assembled in the evening of the same day at
Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, and probably to Peter also, he appointed a time and place when he would meet them all, at a sufficient distance from the time of his speaking. Consequently, if any doubts remained on the minds of any of them, they had time to consider what satisfaction they required, and might, of course, be prepared to get that satisfaction, which it is evident he never refused them, even offering himself to be handled, and examined by them at their leisure, and eating and drinking along with them. Indeed, the marks of crucifixion on his hands and feet, and the wound in his side, were abundantly sufficient to identify his person. What is recorded concerning Thomas was probably the case of many others; nor did his incredulity exceed that of the rest, though he expressed it in a stronger manner; and the satisfaction that Jesus gave to Thomas, he was, no doubt, as ready to give to any others of them.

3. The appearances were sufficiently frequent, viz. four times on the day of resurrection, first to Mary Magdalene, then to Peter, then to the two disciples walking to

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Emmaus,

Emmaus, then to the Ten in the absence of Thomas, and afterwards to all the Eleven. In Galilee he first appeared unexpectedly to Peter, John, and a few others, and then to more than five hundred at once. This must have been the great meeting by appointment, though particularly mentioned by Paul only. Another time he appeared to James, called his brother, or near relation, then to all the disciples (who were more than an hundred residing at Jerusalem, when he went with them to the mount

of Olives, and at leisure ascended above the clouds in their sight. Though these are all the appearances that are particularly recorded, there were probably many more, for no one writer has mentioned all these, not even Paul, who seems to have intended to recite all that he could recollect at that time. None of these appearances, I would also observe, were at midnight, when persons, suddenly awaking from sleep, have not the perfect use of their senses and judgment; but in the day; not at a distance, but quite near; and not transient, but of a sufficient length of time.

Surely,

Surely, then, we are authorized to say that, as far as *numbers* were requisite to give evidence concerning any particular event, these were quite sufficient. For if the evidence of five hundred would not remove the doubts of any persons, neither would that of five thousand, or of any number whatever. They were also persons who had every character of unexceptionable witnesses, as they cannot be supposed to have been deceived themselves, or to have had any motive to wish to impose upon others; because they had no interest in doing it.

4. The appearances were continued to a sufficient period, viz. the space of forty days, which was certainly time enough for any persons to recollect themselves, to get over any impression of surprise, and to be perfectly collected, so as to be put upon their guard against any cause of deception, and to examine and satisfy themselves at their full leisure.

Such is the direct evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, than which nothing can well be conceived to be stronger, resting upon the testimony of a sufficient number
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of the most competent witnesses, not prepossessed in favour of an *expected* event, and who yet had time to recover from the surprise occasioned by an *unexpected* one. It was also a testimony to which they all adhered through life, notwithstanding the greatest temptation that men could lie under to tell a different story.

I shall now consider some objections that have been made to this evidence.

1. It has been said that Jesus ought to have continued longer in a state of death, as till the body had putrified, &c. so that the revival of it might have been the more extraordinary. In this view, no doubt, the evidence of a proper resurrection might have been made more striking. But then, though the evidence would have gained strength in one way, it would, by this very means, have lost much more in another. Not to say that a resurrection from any state of unquestionable death, is as much a proof of a real miracle, as from any other state. That is, it required nothing less than a *divine power*, which is undoubtedly equal to the raising a man from death at any pe-

riod, as well as the making of any number of new men.

But had the resurrection of Jesus been at any considerable distance of time, the evidence of his *death*, and consequently that of a miracle in his *resurrection*, had not been so clear. For then it might have been said that, in so long time, he might have recovered from the effect of a seeming death; that his disciples had time to recover from their consternation, and lay their schemes for any particular purpose; that, in so long an interval, the guard of the sepulchre might have been more negligently kept, the seal on the stone might have been broken by some accident, and Jesus, being alive, might have been conveyed away, and time given for his appearance, as raised from the dead.

But considering that Jesus was taken down from the cross, to all appearance at least dead, and left in the state of a corpse, swathed in spices, late on Friday evening, and then left alone, in a cold sepulchre, it was absolutely impossible, whatever life may be supposed to have remained in him,
that

that he should have appeared not only alive, but in perfect health and vigour, walking about, and conversing, as if nothing at all had been done to him, so early as at day-break on the Sunday following. In the evening of that day he walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, which was about eight miles, and also back again, and as speedily as two men in health, and who made all the haste they could, were able to do the same. This is the more extraordinary, considering the wounds that had been made in the *feet* of Jesus. If a man had suffered nothing more than this piercing of his feet, in the rough manner in which it was, no doubt, done in the act of crucifixion, this walk alone would have been absolutely impossible; and on the third day he would have been even less able to walk than on the first, from the inflammation of the wounds. There must, therefore, have been some miracle in the case; and if any miracle was performed, why not that of a real resurrection?

It may be said that the evidence of a real miracle would have been still stronger, if the

the bones of Jesus had been broken, like those of the two thieves. But as the piercing of his feet, the wound in his side, and even the hanging so long on the cross, must have effectually incapacitated him from walking abroad within two days, the breaking of his bones would have made no real addition to the evidence; the *impossibility* of his walking abroad being really the same in both cases. There would have been a difference only in the case of *probabilities*, which vary with circumstances. But any one natural and absolute *impossibility* furnishes as strong an argument as another.

In this very important view, therefore, the less was the time that intervened between Jesus' having been laid in the sepulchre, and his appearance alive and well out of it, the stronger is the evidence of a divine interposition, and unbelievers would have had more to object if that interval had been longer, than they can have at present. Jesus, we can now say, appeared alive and well sooner than it was *possible*, in the ordinary course of nature, that he could have done. It was before the guard could have
been

been relaxed, before the disciples could have recovered from their consternation; and especially before it was possible for him to have recovered from the languishing state in which crucifixion must have left any man; to say nothing of the wound he had received in his side, which alone, if it had missed any vital part, must have confined him, and have disabled him from going abroad, a very long time.

2. It may be proper to take some notice of the story that was propagated by the Jewish priests, who, when the guard fled at the appearance of the angel and the earthquake, bade them say that *the disciples of Jesus came by night, and stole him away while they slept*. This, however, was both in the highest degree improbable, and what is more, it would not have answered any purpose; so that they who had just before behaved in the most cowardly manner possible, must have risked their lives for nothing. Indeed, such a story as this would hardly have been suggested by the enemies of Christianity, if any thing had been known at the time besides the earthquake, the appearance

pearance of the angel, and a suspicion, perhaps a report, of the absence of the body, and if any thing had occurred to them more plausible at the time. So weak a defence almost amounts to a confession of the weakness of the cause to be supported by it.

The improbability alone of any considerable number of men all sleeping, whose business it was to keep awake, and not more than two or three hours, for which they had time enough to prepare themselves by sleeping the preceding part of the night (for this was the last watch, at break of day) and when the penalty of sleeping was death; and that they should all sleep so soundly, as that the rolling of a large stone (so large that several women despaired of being able to move it) and this quite near to them, should not awake any one of them, is far too great to be admitted.

The disciples of Jesus, if such a scheme had come into their minds, dispirited and dispersed as they were, could have had no expectation of accomplishing of it *undiscovered*, even if there had been no guard at the sepulchre. The city of Jerusalem was
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at that time full of people, beyond any thing that we can have an idea of at present, being the time of passover, and when the moon was at the full, so that numbers of people (the houses of the city not being sufficient to receive them) would be walking about at all hours; and the sepulchre was so near to the city, that it is now inclosed within the walls. In that climate, and that time of the year, there was no inconvenience in passing the whole night, and even sleeping, in the open air. The preceding night Jesus and his disciples had passed in a neighbouring garden; and it is very probable that they had done the same before, since Judas expected to find them there. In these circumstances, the disciples could not have had any reasonable expectation of removing the body undisturbed.

Besides, what would the removal of a mere corpse, admitting that they might have had the courage, and address, to succeed in so unpromising an attempt, have availed them? There would have been no evidence of a *resurrection*, unless the
dead

dead man could have been exhibited alive, which it was certainly out of their power to do.

If a few of the disciples of Jesus had been so abandoned, and at the same time so stupid, as to have attempted an imposition of this kind, an imposition from which they could not have derived any imaginable advantage, how could they have made others believe a resurrection of which they saw no evidence? Would the mere absence of the body have satisfied Thomas (who, though one of the twelve, was certainly not in the secret) the five hundred who went by appointment into Galilee, or the thousands who were converted by Peter immediately after this event; and would none of them have abandoned so groundless a faith in time of persecution? Would not torture, and the prospect of death, have extorted a confession of the cheat from some of those who were in the secret.

Lastly, what prospect could the disciples of Jesus have had of being able to carry on the scheme that was begun by their master, without his power of working miracles, of
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which they must have known themselves to be destitute. It was, no doubt, the possession of this power, and this alone, that emboldened them, disappointed and dispirited as they had been before, to persist in the same scheme, and without this they would certainly have absconded, and have been no more heard of. They were neither orators, nor warriors, and therefore were destitute of all the natural means of success.

3. The objection that has been urged in the strongest manner, and to which I must, therefore, give the more particular attention, is, that, after his resurrection, Jesus should have appeared as publicly as he had done before his death, and especially in the presence of his judges, and of his enemies. This, they say, would have satisfied them, and the whole country, and of course all the world, so that no doubt would have remained on the subject.

But the resurrection of Jesus himself might not have conciliated those who were only the more exasperated at the resurrection of Lazarus, at which themselves were present,

present, from whatever source their obstinacy and incredulity arose. The whole story, how well soever attested, might have been laughed at in Greece and at Rome, where the Jews and every thing relating to them, were, without any examination into the subject, held in the greatest contempt. Besides, there would have been a want of dignity, and an appearance of insult, unworthy of our Saviour's character, in thus ostentatiously exhibiting himself before his enemies, and as it were mocking at their attempts to kill him.

I would farther observe, that though Jesus did not appear to *all* his enemies, he did appear to *one* of them, and one whom no person will doubt to have been as prejudiced, and as inveterate, as any of them, viz. Paul. Now, as *this* enemy of Christianity was convinced of the truth of the resurrection, by Jesus appearing to him in person, we cannot doubt but that, if it had suited the plan of Divine Providence, *all* the Jews might have been convinced by the same means, and have become Christians.

But admitting that the consequence of

such a public appearance of Jesus would have been the conviction of all that country, and of all that age, it would have been an unfavourable circumstance with respect to the evidence at this distance of time, and still more so in remoter ages. And the great object certainly was, that this important event should be so circumstanced, as that it should preserve its credit unimpaired to the end of time.

If we suppose that mankind in the most distant ages of the world had been asked, What kind of evidence would satisfy *them*, with respect to the reality of an event which took place several thousand years before they were born, they would certainly say ; that, to give satisfaction to *them* who had no opportunity of examining into the fact themselves, it should have been so circumstanced, as that besides a sufficient number of persons attesting the truth of it, friends and enemies, believers and unbelievers, should clearly appear to have been sufficiently *interested* to examine into the truth, while the fact was *recent*, and therefore while it was in their power to investigate it thoroughly.

thoroughly. And this could only be in circumstances in which some should believe it and others not, and in which the believers should have every temptation to renounce their belief, and their enemies every motive to detect the imposture. But this could not have been the case if the resurrection of Jesus had been universally believed at the time, or in that age, and consequently there had been no early persecution of Christians.

In these circumstances, it might have been said by unbelievers in remote ages, that, as no opposition was made to the progress of Christianity, it did not appear to them that the reality of those facts on which the belief of it is founded had been sufficiently enquired into at the time, that it might have been found convenient (for reasons now unknown, and at this distance inscrutable) to make a change in the religion of the country; and that, as the rulers of it adopted the measure, it might, for any thing that appeared, have been originally a scheme of *theirs*; and that when the governors of any country interest

themselves to promote any measure, it is always in their power to impose upon the vulgar; that private orders, for example, might have been given, that Jesus, though suspended on a cross, should not be much hurt; that the sepulchre, being underground, might have proper apartments adjoining to it, where there might be every accommodation that was requisite for his complete recovery and refreshment; and that a few leading persons being in the secret, the rest might be imposed upon to believe the story of a resurrection, or any thing else.

Thus the origin of Christianity, it might have been said, did not materially differ from that of the several species of heathenism or Mahometanism, which the people first believed without any proper enquiry, and to which their descendants adhered because they had been received by their ancestors before them.

But the circumstances attending the actual promulgation of Christianity were such, as that nothing of this kind can ever be advanced by any unbelievers, at all acquainted

with the history of the times ; because it is evident, that Jesus Christ, and his religion, and especially the account of his resurrection, on which the whole of it hinged, immediately engaged the closest attention of great numbers, and that thousands felt themselves interested in the highest degree to examine into the truth of it.

In the first place, the apostles, and other primitive Christians, were certainly interested not to give up their ease, their little fortunes, and their lives, for an idle tale. And, on the other hand, the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, who had been so much exasperated at Jesus as to procure his death, even with some risque to themselves, from his popularity with the common people, would feel themselves more strongly interested to suppress his followers, and his religion, after his death ; and this they evidently did, without losing any time in the business.

Not more than fifty days elapsed between the crucifixion of Jesus and the most open publication of the account of his resurrection, an event spoken of even before his

death, against any imposition with respect to which all possible precautions had been taken, and concerning which many rumours must have prevailed from the pass-over to Pentecost (for no secrecy was enjoined with respect to it) from the very day of his appearance. On the day of Pentecost, however, it was boldly asserted by such a number of persons, who were witnesses of the fact, that some thousands (who had themselves seen the miracles of Jesus) were fully convinced of its truth, and gave public testimony of their faith by being immediately baptized.

Observe in how full and explicit a manner Peter, on this occasion, gave his testimony, as quoted in the preceding Discourse, Acts ii. 22. *Ye men of Israel, hear my words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all (and about one hundred and twenty were then with him) are witnesses.*

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The boldness of the apostles in giving this public testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, a testimony which his audience evidently could not contradict, exasperated the rulers of the country to the highest degree; and the event being then recent, they would, no doubt, do every thing that men, and men in power, could do in order to discover the cheat, if any such had been used.

This endeavour to suppress Christianity began in the very country, and in the very city, in which it was first promulgated, where Jesus had always appeared in public, and consequently where himself, and all that he had done, were known to thousands. And this violent opposition, than which we know of nothing in the history of mankind more violent, and which began as early as it was possible for it to begin, was continued by the Jews, with very few interruptions, till it was taken up by the Romans, who were alarmed at the rapid spread of the new religion, which soon appeared to be hostile to all the old ones, on the observance of which it was universally
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imagined that the temporal prosperity of states depended. And this persecution of Christianity did not end till about three hundred years after its promulgation, that is, till all farther scrutiny into the facts was equally impossible and needless.

Did not this situation of things most strongly invite all persons to make the most rigorous inquiry into the truth of the facts on which Christianity was founded, and especially that of the resurrection of Jesus? Would not all the five hundred as long as they lived (and according to Paul many of them were living in the year 52, and the apostle John, it is supposed, did not die till about A. D. 90) be continually speaking of it, and examined concerning it. This would certainly be the case if any such event had happened at this day, and human nature we cannot doubt to have been the same in all ages.

What, then, could any of those who are now unbelievers in Christianity have done, if they had been living at the time of the promulgation of it, more than other unbelievers then did, who, whatever else they might

might do, or say, could not discover any marks of imposture. No other facts in the whole compass of history, we may safely venture to assert, ever underwent a thousandth part of the investigation that, from the nature of the circumstances, *these* must have done; and, what is of particular consequence, at the time when the investigation was the most easy.

Though Jesus did not appear in public after his resurrection, the miracle of *the descent of the Holy Spirit*, enabling the apostles and other disciples to speak intelligibly languages which they had not been taught, and also many other miracles wrought by them, were as public as possible; and every miracle wrought by the apostles was, in fact, a proof of the resurrection of their master. If his mission, confirmed by, and implying the truth of, his resurrection, was not from God, neither was theirs; for both were part of the same scheme, and therefore they imply one another.

Thus our faith does not rest on the testimony of the four evangelists, Matthew,
Mark,

Mark, Luke, and John, who wrote the history of Christ, and of the promulgation of Christianity. We have, in fact, the testimony of the age in which they lived, to the great events recorded by them. These books, or ever so many of the same nature, could never have been received, and transmitted to us, as authentic histories, in the circumstances that I have described, if the contents of them could have been questioned.

The inconsistencies that we discover in the accounts of the four evangelists imply no defect in the evidence; being no greater than are usually found in the narratives of any important event written by different persons; who will always attend chiefly to what is most essential to the story, and less to the minute circumstances of it; and these narratives were all written a considerable time after the event. But the most important consideration is, that these histories were not the cause of the belief of the resurrection of Jesus, but were themselves among the consequences of that belief, the proper evidence having produced its

its full effect long before they were written ; so that it could not have been deficient in any material respect.

That all mankind were not immediately convinced of the truth of Christianity may be sufficiently accounted for ; as, from the little interest that great numbers take in any thing relating to *religion* ; from the aversion which the greatest part of mankind have to examine into any thing that is *new*, when it is hostile to that which is *old*, and their listening to any idle tales to the prejudice of those who teach it, which we see every day. And if the powerful, the learned, and the polite, whose prejudices, especially against any thing that originates with the *illiterate*, are well known to be as strong as any prejudices whatever, would not read or think seriously on the subject (which was evidently the case with the generality of the Greek and Roman philosophers, and other persons of distinction at that time) many would be influenced by their example, and join in a blind opposition to what they had never considered, from imagining that it was not worth their while to consider it.

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Besides all this, we are to consider the great numbers who were, directly or indirectly, interested in the support of the old established systems of religion, who would feel themselves exasperated, and therefore, without any enquiry into the merits of the case, would, with all their might, oppose the progress of the new religion. Such would be the case with many persons of eminence and influence; and the lower orders, the mob, might be inflamed by any idle tales. This is nothing more than the common fate of all reformers, and all reformations in matters of religion. It flows from the common principles of human nature, which are the same in all ages, and which operate in the same manner in all similar circumstances.

In this state things continued as long as they possibly could, the friends and the enemies of Christianity being equally interested to discover the truth, while the facts were at all recent, and most easy to be investigated; and the new religion established itself gradually, as, if founded on truth, and unaided by power, it naturally would do in
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such circumstances. The attention of the more dispassionate and disinterested was gradually gained, and converts were in time made of some men of learning, who were capable of writing in defence of Christianity, and whose writings made other converts, both philosophers and others.

At length the converts to Christianity in all places, and especially in those that were the nearest to the scene of the transactions, were so numerous, that the old religion sunk into general contempt and neglect; and in less than three hundred years after the promulgation of Christianity, we see that, notwithstanding the deep-rooted attachment of all the heathen world to the religion of their ancestors, Constantine could safely declare himself a Christian, without any apprehension from his competitors, who endeavoured to avail themselves of that circumstance. None of them, however, were able, by this means, to throw any considerable obstacle in his way, and he reigned almost in peace, and a longer time than any of the emperors after Augustus.

This is a clear proof of the preceding
spread

spread of Christianity, and of the hold which it had got on the minds of the people in general; and this was in the most disadvantageous circumstances that can be imagined, if it had been an imposture. But this most striking evidence of the truth of Christianity we could not now have had, if the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus had been such, as to have convinced all the Jews, and all the world, as soon as he appeared. What had been the most satisfactory to *them* would have been (from the nature of the thing) the least so to *us*.

When the persecution of Christianity began, the facts on which it was founded were recent, so that it was in the power of men of sense and enquiry to satisfy themselves concerning them; and we have seen that they were sufficiently interested so to do. But if one whole generation should have been, as we say, *infatuated*, so as to have taken up the belief of these facts without any sufficient reason, the next generation might have been sensible of this, and have made more diligent search (and then it was not too late) and not have thrown
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away their fortunes and their lives for nothing, as their fathers had done before them. But notwithstanding this, every enquiry continued to make more converts, till, without any aid from power, or from learning in the first instance, the new religion completely established itself on the ruins of the old, and was embraced by persons of all ranks without distinction, the rich and the poor, the philosophers and the vulgar.

If all this could take place without there being any truth in the history of the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, it must have been more extraordinary, nay, strictly speaking, more miraculous, than those events themselves. For human nature was the same then that it is now; and that *men*, such as we now find them to be, should, in the circumstances that I have now described, have been impressed as the early converts to Christianity were; that they should have been induced to believe a story which they might easily have discovered to be destitute of all foundation, and have sacrificed so much as they did to their belief, must have been the greatest of all

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miracles;

miracles ; no natural cause being adequate to such an effect. It must also have been so stupendous a miracle (operating on *the minds of men*, which is more extraordinary than any effect that is apparent to the senses) without any rational end or object. Nay the Divine Being must have wrought this miracle with no other view than to puzzle and confound his creatures, and to involve some of the most deserving of them in the greatest calamities. On the other hand, the miracles which gave birth to Christianity had the greatest and noblest of all objects, the instruction and reformation of the world. In fact, the proof of Christianity supplies the only probable method of accounting for past and present *appearances*, and therefore what a true *philosopher*, whose object it is to enquire into the *causes of things*, will adopt, in preference to any other.

It was, however, you clearly see, of the greatest advantage to the evidence of the truth of Christianity in distant ages, that the bulk of the Jewish nation should from the beginning have been hostile to it ;
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while at the same time the belief of such numbers of them, prejudiced as they must all have been against it, is an abundant proof of its truth. But when, by the long continued enmity of the Jews to the Christians, it shall be sufficiently evident, that it was no scheme of that nation in general, and that, so far from giving it any aid in its infant state, they discountenanced it as much as it was in their power to do it; if ever they should be converted to Christianity, before or after their return to their own country (both which events are foretold in the Scriptures) it will be such a clear fulfilment of prophecy, as it seems probable that no power of incredulity will be able to resist; and then, as Paul says, Rom. xi. 15. *If the casting away of the Jews be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?*

I shall conclude this part of my discourse with observing, that the truth of Christianity is founded upon plain *facts*, such as any persons who had the use of their senses might be judges of. Opinions of other kinds men may become so fully persuaded

of, as even to die for them, as well as Christians have done for their religion; but then the *nature* and *ground* of their faith have been different; they having been either misled by an *implicit faith* in persons who they thought could not mislead them, or by *reasoning wrong*. That Mahomet, for example, or Swedenborg, had divine missions, many might be induced to believe on their own confident assertions, having a good opinion of the men; or they might imagine that the conquests of Mahomet and his followers, could not have been so great and so rapid, if his pretensions had not been well founded. But is this such *kind* of evidence as that on which we believe the truth of Christianity; which neither requires that implicit faith be given to any person, nor any reasoning, except the plainest of all, viz. that if any person do such works as God only could enable him to do, he must be empowered by God to do them, and the evidence of their own senses that such works were done? The truth of Christianity rests on the evidence of such visible marks of divine power as
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the instant curing of the most dangerous disorders, and the raising of persons, and especially of Jesus himself, from a state of actual death, with respect to which men who had only eyes, ears, and other natural senses, could not possibly be deceived; whereas no visible miracle of any kind was so much as pretended to by either Mahomet or Swedenborg.

We also see the great difference of the ground of belief in these cases in the time that was requisite to produce their effect. Mahomet was several years in persuading any besides a very few persons, particularly connected with him, and who had a prospect of being gainers by his success, of his divine mission, and it was thirteen years before he had followers enow to venture to take the field with them, so as to attack a caravan, to which they were led by the hope of plunder. As to Swedenborg, though he died several years ago, his followers are only just now beginning to make themselves conspicuous. On the contrary, it is evident that Jesus might, if he had been so disposed, have mustered as large an army

as he chose within a month or two after he appeared in a public character.

Some are so incredulous as to say, that, admitting all the facts recited in the gospel history, viz. that the apostles, and other disciples of Jesus, had no doubt of his resurrection, and that their previous incredulity was overcome by the most satisfactory evidence; yet that it was more probable that their senses, that of feeling, as well as those of seeing and hearing, were repeatedly imposed upon, than that there should have been a proper resurrection of a man who had been dead. But such a deception as this could not have been effected without a miracle; and for what end could such a miracle have been wrought? As it had all the effect of a real resurrection, it is liable to all the same objections, and therefore if the one was produced, the other might be also.

If any person will say either that the appearances recorded in the New Testament are no proofs of a real resurrection, or (which has also been said) that the real resurrection of Jesus would be no proof of his
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his divine mission, and of the truth of his religion, so that we could not thence infer the certainty of our own resurrection, they must be so constituted, as that no evidence whatever can produce that conviction in their minds. The Divine Being himself (and I must in this argument suppose that there is such a Being) could not do it. For all that *he* could do to attest the divine mission of any person could only be his enabling him to work miracles, or to do such things as only he himself, the author of nature, could do. But no person, in the age of the apostles, or any subsequent one, ever believed the facts, and doubted the conclusion; so that the miracles were fully adequate to the purpose of them; and since all men are, no doubt, constituted alike, the present objectors must be under the influence of a prejudice that nothing can overcome, and this must be a case exactly similar to insanity.

I now proceed to shew that the solution of such difficulties as these, respecting the truth of *revealed religion*, may assist those who have similar difficulties with respect to

natural religion; and all great moral truths have, directly or indirectly, a connexion with each other.

Now it seems to be impossible for any person to be convinced by historical evidence (which is the most intelligible of all evidence whatever) of the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ, and at the same time to have any doubt of the being and the providence of God, because the one evidently implies the other. If Christ actually wrought miracles, and, after dying, rose from the dead, there must have been a *power* that enabled him so to do; and this must have been an intelligent,

or a designing, and a benevolent power, the laws of nature having been changed for great and good purposes.

It is in vain for any person to say, as some, however, have done, that till we be satisfied with respect to the being of a God, which, in the order of nature, is the first of all religious truths, it is to no purpose to inquire into the evidence of christianity. For though it be most convenient to *teach*, and to *consider*, any system of truths in a certain

certain order, the *discovery* of them is altogether independent of that order. In this case, *the first may be last, and the last first,*

An Englishman, for example, may say, and plausibly enough, that he ought to understand his own country, before he explores any other. But it may happen that he shall be carried to Asia, Africa, or America, before he can have seen much of his own country, and thereby have a better opportunity of exploring *them* than his own. Or, considering the sun as the centre of our system, he might fancy that, till we know what that great body is, it is absurd to give much attention to the *planets*, which depend upon it. But in this way he might live and die without acquiring any knowledge of them at all. Even the several propositions in geometry may be learned in a very different order, as the different treatises on that branch of science evince, and yet be all equally well understood at the last. In like manner may men attain to the knowledge of God, and of his pro-
vidence,

vidence, without beginning with the study of them.

An atheist is a person who believes that there is no Being who established the present order of nature, but that all things have always been as they now are, and that all deviations from this order are absolutely impossible, and therefore incredible. Consequently, any clear proof of an actual deviation from this order of nature overturns his whole system. The atheist says that, since we must suppose something to have been *uncaused*, we may just as well content ourselves with saying that the present visible system had no cause, as suppose that something still greater than this system, and the cause of it, had no cause; since by ascending higher, we get no nearer to the solution of our great difficulty, viz. the *cause of what exists*. But the proof of any miracle is decisively in favour of the actual existence of a power unquestionably above the common course of nature, and different from it. This is no less than a demonstration, that the reasoning of the atheist, however specious, is *in fact* wrong;

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and that, difficult as it may be to conceive the self-existence, as we say, of a Being greater than the visible universe, such a Being certainly does exist. I shall endeavour to make this argument still plainer by an illustration.

Let a person unacquainted with clocks, watches, and other machines, be introduced into a room containing many of them, all in regular motion. He sees no maker of these machines, and knows nothing of their internal structure; and as he sees them all to move with perfect regularity, he may say, on the principles of the atheistical system, that they are *automata*, or self-moving machines; and so long as all these machines continue in regular motion, and he knows nothing of the making of them, or the winding of them up, this theory may appear plausible.

But let us suppose that, coming into this room again and again, and, always attending to the machines, he shall find one of them much out of order, and that at length its motion shall intirely cease; but that after continuing in this state some time, he shall
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again find it in perfect order, moving as regularly as ever. Will he not then conclude that some person, whom he has not seen, but probably the maker of the machines, had been in the room in his absence? The restoration of motion to the disordered machine would impress his mind with the idea of a *maker* of them in a much more forcible manner than his observing the regular construction, and uniform motion of them. It must convince him of the existence of some person capable of *regulating*, and therefore probably of *making*, these machines, whether he should ever see this person or not.

Thus do miracles prove the existence of a God in a shorter and more satisfactory manner than the observation of the uninterrupted course of nature. If there be a Being who can *controul* the course of nature, there must be one who originally *established* it, in whatever difficulty we may still be left with respect to his nature, and the manner of his existence. We are compelled by a greater difficulty to admit a less, though acknowledged to be great.

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At all events, we see in miracles that there certainly exists a Being superior to ourselves, or any thing that is the object of our senses.

And thus is demonstrated the wisdom of the general plan of Divine Providence, in ordering that the laws of nature should not always proceed without interruption, but in providing that the attention of mankind should sometimes be arrested by miraculous events ; since they are eminently calculated to lead the minds of men to the consideration of a superior Being, as the cause of all events, ordinary and extraordinary. Thus also is evident the folly and ignorance of those who think all miraculous events to be so absurd as to be in their own nature incredible, and therefore that no evidence in their favour can deserve the least attention. If the reverence of mankind for their Maker be of any use, or of any consequence to their happiness, which undoubtedly it is, occasional miracles have the greatest propriety, and therefore great antecedent credibility, though all the particular

ticular facts require very circumstantial evidence, because they are not of frequent occurrence.

I now come to draw some practical inferences from the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus.

Such is the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, exclusive of the general evidence of christianity, or of the miracles of Jesus, and those of the apostles after him, which are also another confirmation of the truth of this one great event. And, surely, it appears that the circumstances attending the resurrection of Jesus were so ordered by Divine Providence, that it is not in the power of man to imagine any change in them that, according to the known laws of evidence, would make it more credible than it is with respect to distant ages. Every objection that has hitherto been made to this evidence has led to a more rigorous examination of the circumstances; and the consequence of this has always been an addition of light upon the evidence, and a greater confirmation of it. We are therefore abundantly authorized to consider our
faith

faith as *founded upon a rock*, which no future objection will be able to shake.

Since, therefore, we may consider it as a certain and unquestionable fact, that *Christ is risen from the dead*, we may likewise, with the apostle, consider him as *the first fruits of them that sleep*, or that his resurrection is a pledge and assurance of our own, which it is the great object of christianity to enforce. Christ is called the *first fruits*, and these are the forerunners of a general harvest. *Afterwards*, says the apostle, *they that are Christ's, at his coming*. For Christ has only left the present scene for a time. If there be any truth in the facts, the evidence of which has now been laid before you, he will certainly come again, and that *with power and great glory*, to raise the dead, and to give unto every man according to his works.

Let us, therefore, my christian brethren, be continually looking for this great event, this *great day of God*, as it is sometimes called. For to all of us it is *nigh, even at the doors*. Long as the sleep of death may really be, it will appear to each of us to
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be only a moment. In death we, as it were, only shut our eyes upon this world, and immediately open them in another, with the brightest and most glorious prospects, if our conversation has been such as becomes the gospel, but with the most gloomy and dreadful ones, if this great light *hath come into the world, and we have loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds were evil.*

The mere profession of christianity will avail us nothing, nay much less than nothing, because it lays us under stronger obligations to a virtuous life, and therefore will aggravate our condemnation if we do not live as, by ranking with christians, we profess to live. Better, far better, would it be for us, at the day of judgment, to be able to say we had never heard of Christ, than *naming the name of Christ*, or professing his religion, not to have been thereby led to *depart from iniquity*, and to be to him *a peculiar people zealous of good works.*

Christianity is much less to be considered as a system of doctrines, than as a rule of practice.

practice. Nay the doctrines themselves (the chief of which is that of a future state of retribution) have no other object than the regulation of our lives. What the great duties of the christian life are, we are all sufficiently acquainted with. They are comprehended in two great precepts, the first of which is the love of God with all our hearts, implying an intire and chearful devotedness to his will, in doing and in suffering, in life and in death. And the second is the loving of our neighbour as ourselves, implying a readiness, in all cases, to do to others as we should think it right that they should do to us. We should all habitually consider one another as brethren, the children of the same great universal parent, the care of the same benevolent providence, as training up in the same school of moral discipline here, and as heirs together of the same glorious hope of eternal life hereafter.

To fit us for these devotional and social duties, we should also be careful to exercise a constant government over our appetites and passions, that, as the apostle says, we

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may preserve ourselves as the *unpolluted temples of the spirit of God*.

Thus, my Christian brethren, *knowing our duty, happy shall we be if we do it*; that when our Lord, after his long absence, shall return to *take an account of his servants*, when *our eyes, and when every eye, shall see him*, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming; but having duly improved the talents committed to each of us, may hear from his mouth the joyful sentence, *Well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord*.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XII.

A View of Revealed Religion.

— *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power, to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.*

EPHES. i. 17—20.

THE apostle, writing to those who had lately been heathens, frequently, and very properly, reminds them of the great benefit they derived from the knowledge of the

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gospel.

gospel. This he does more especially in the introduction to this epistle to the Ephesians. It is, indeed, of great importance that our minds should always be impressed with a sense of what we owe to the fountain of all good in this most important respect, especially as, having never ourselves seen, or known, much of heathenism, we are too apt to think less of the happiness of our emancipation from it. And as I am now come to the conclusion of these Discourses on the Evidence of Divine Revelation, I shall endeavour to bring to your recollection the several particulars of which the knowledge we derive from revelation, and more especially from Christianity, consists.

But I shall first consider the propriety of having recourse to any measures whatever on the part of the Divine Being, farther than the natural means that he had employed for the moral improvement of mankind.

That the Divine Being has really made provision for promoting the virtue and happiness

piness of men in the constitution of nature and of the world, is not to be denied. There are numberless particulars in the make of our bodies, and in the faculties of our minds, which, if attended to, will teach us that vice and wickedness (consisting in the excessive and irregular indulgence of our passions) is hurtful to man; that it tends to debase our natures, and subjects us to pain and anguish; and that if we would live in the greatest dignity and happiness, we must live in the habitual practice of all virtue. Some will, therefore, ask, Is not nature alone a sufficient guide to virtue and happiness? and may not men, by these helps, and the proper use of the *reason* with which they are endued, be their own instructors? Why might not mankind have been left to themselves, when their own reason, assisted by observation and experience, would teach them to correct their vices, and improve their natures to the utmost? and when the Divine Being had done thus much for us, what occasion was there for his doing any thing more?

In replying to this, it must be acknowledged that, if men would make the most of their reason, and conscientiously obey all its dictates, it would be a sufficient director in the conduct of life. But what must we say if, from whatever cause, and through whatever foreign influence, men become indisposed to make this right use of their reason, and especially if they be not sufficiently apprized of all the consequences of their conduct; and if, in that state of ignorance and darkness, they want stronger *motives* than will ever occur to themselves, to the practice of universal virtue. In these circumstances it was surely highly expedient that the great parent and friend of mankind should interpose, to apprize them of these consequences, that he should send proper persons, duly authorized, to engage their attention, and thus to inform their judgment, interest their affections, and direct their conduct.

I must farther observe, in answer to those who object to the scheme of such *occasional interpositions*, and who are struck with the idea of the superior dignity of an
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absolutely uninterrupted operation of the *established laws*, that we are not at liberty to suppose either *man*, or *the world*, to be constituted differently from what they are; because we are no proper judges of such different arrangements of things and their consequences. And considering how men are actually constituted, we may safely conclude that if it was at all necessary (as we cannot but suppose it to be) that such beings as we are should keep up an *attention* to their Maker, this great end will be better answered by his maintaining some visible intercourse with them, than by a rigorous adherence to any original constitution of things whatever, while himself was kept out of view.

The bulk of mankind (and by this we are to judge) do not naturally inquire into the cause of what they see to be *constant* and *invariable*. They see, for example, the sun to rise and set, and all the changes of the seasons to take place, without ever reflecting on their author, or final cause, or at least acquiescing in any lame account of

them; so that something out of the common course of nature was necessary to arrest their attention, and lead them to think of the Author of Nature, of what they see and experience every day.

The authors of the Greek and Roman theology never went farther in their speculations than the *visible universe*. They had gods in great abundance, but imagined the world to be more ancient than them all; and the great object of the most ancient idolatry were the sun, moon, and stars, the earth, and other parts of *nature*, having never imagined that these had any author.

Besides, in order that man may keep up an idea of God, as a *person*, a being with whom they have to do, as the inspector and judge of their conduct, it seems necessary that there should be on his part some *personal acts*, such as promulgating laws, sending messengers, expressing his pleasure or displeasure at their conduct, and the like. Without something of this kind, the course of nature, though bearing infinite marks of intelligence, might never suggest the idea
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of an *intelligent person*, the proper object of prayer, a lawgiver, and a judge.

We clearly see this in the case of numbers who, disbelieving revelation, do, at this day, seriously maintain that there is no intelligent principle in the universe, besides the visible works of nature. They, therefore, do not admit what we may call the *personality of the supreme cause of all*; and without this there will never be any such thing as piety towards God, as a Being whom we conceive to be ever present with us, as the inspector and the judge of our conduct. These persons never pray.

For want of this the best of the heathens were intirely destitute of that most essential branch of virtue. And without an habitual regard to God, as our common parent, there is no sufficient foundation for the duties we owe to his offspring, or even the duties that respect ourselves. Where there is no proper *lawgiver*, there can be no proper *law*. Without a proper regard to God in all our ways, our minds would be liable to be disturbed and unhinged by the events of life, and we should more especially find
ourselves

ourselves destitute of power to carry us through severe trials and sufferings in the cause of truth and a good conscience. But an habitual respect to the being, the presence, and the providence of God, extending through this life and the next, is abundantly sufficient for all these purposes. It was therefore most truly said by our Lord, *No man cometh to the Father but by me*, or, as we may interpret it, *revealed religion* is the only foundation of what is termed *natural religion*.

It is not only on the authority of the most probable *reasons*, but on the evidence of the most indisputable *facts*, that we assert the necessity of extraordinary interpositions on the part of the Divine Being, to engage the attention of mankind to himself, in order to reform the world, and restore the practice of virtue among men. We see in history how grossly ignorant the heathen world remained of the nature and perfections of God; and of the purity of his worship, and how lost they were to a just sense of piety and virtue, while they were suffered to continue without supernatural revelation.

velation. And from the length of time in which the wisest and most polished nations continued in this state of ignorance and corruption, it was manifest that natural means were not sufficient to enlighten their minds, and reform their conduct. These, as we are authorised to say, had been long tried without effect. For while arts and sciences were cultivated, and brought to a considerable degree of perfection, religious notions, and religious rites, became, if possible, more absurd. For after the worship of the sun, moon, and stars (which was the original idolatry of mankind, and continued to be that of the more barbarous part of the world) the polished Egyptians and Greeks added that of dead men. And how deplorable, in a moral respect, is the state of those parts of the world to which the knowledge of Christianity has not reached, or in which its glorious and salutary light is extinguished.

It was therefore a measure highly worthy of the wisdom and goodness of almighty God, in order to accomplish his gracious design of raising men to a state of glory and happiness,

happiness, to appoint some persons to be, as it were, his ambassadors to the world lying in darkness and wickedness, to instruct them in the truths relating to their most important concerns, and to lay before them, with plainness and energy, the proper motives for reforming their conduct; and it was necessary that, for this purpose, these persons should come with authority, bearing evident tokens of a divine mission, by the working of *miracles*, or such works as men might be satisfied could not be performed without God (the author of nature, and who alone can control its laws) being with them.

With this view, if any history be credible, the Divine Being has actually commissioned various persons to communicate his will to mankind, and especially to warn them of the future consequences of their evil conduct. These persons were chiefly of the nation of the Jews; and the object of their missions was to instruct their countrymen in the first instance, and then other nations who had intercourse with them, in the fundamental principles of true religion,

in order to guard them against the abominable vices and extravagancies to which idolatry naturally led them. In like manner was Jesus Christ (of the same nation of the Jews) commissioned to bring the last and most complete revelation of the will of God to man ; so that nothing now remains to be done on the part of God for the moral instruction and reformation of the world.

What it is that God has by these repeated revelations done for mankind, and especially by Jesus Christ, I shall now proceed to specify. But I must farther premise, that the great and ultimate object of the mission of Christ was not at all different from that of the preceding prophets. According to his own representation, in the instructive parable of the vineyard let out to husbandmen, God first sent *servants* to them, to receive the fruits of the vineyard, and last of all, with the same general view, he sent his *son*, or a person so much more distinguished, as to be entitled to that peculiar appellation, though he was of *the same nature*

ture with them, in all things like unto his brethren.

1. By these extraordinary interpositions we have been instructed in the nature, perfections, and moral government of God, and the rule of human duty ; a knowledge of a very important nature, and which mankind, after having been instructed in it, by *becoming vain in their imaginations*, had lost. This knowledge we find in Moses and all the prophets. There we find that God is one, that he made and governs the world,

that he is every where present, observing the conduct of men, that he is merciful to the penitent, but will punish the obstinately wicked. We are also taught in revelation how the one true God is to be worshipped in the most acceptable manner, viz. *in spirit and in truth*, by purity of heart, and uprightness of life. According to Christ, the two great commandments, which include all the rest, are the love of God and of our fellow-creatures.

Thus was laid the foundation of all acceptable worship, and right conduct in life,
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and thus were the minds of men freed from a slavish and debasing superstition, which had taught them to seek to please God by other things than true goodness of heart and life, and had encouraged them to continue in the practice of vice, by trusting to vain compensations and atonements. This was one of the most important services that could be rendered to religion, and to mankind; as there is nothing to which they appear to be more prone than *superstition*, or unworthy notions of God, and consequently wrong methods of seeking to please him.

Beginning with these leading principles, did our Lord, following the example of the prophets who had preceded him, go on to instruct mankind in every useful principle of religion, concealing from them nothing that could in any respect influence their practice. And this, we clearly see, had the most direct tendency to promote the great scheme of our redemption, or our deliverance from vice and misery. For before men can be reclaimed from vicious courses, they must be convinced of the evil of them.

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They must be shewn against how great a Being they are offending, and be informed what it is that will recommend them to his favour. Such knowledge as this is, in its own nature, necessary to all virtuous and religious practice. The judgment, or understanding, must first be enlightened, before the will can be renewed, the affections regulated, and the conduct reformed ; as, in all cases, a thing must be *understood*, before it can be *practised*.

This excellent moral instruction was not, however, as I have said already, peculiar to Christ. He did not pretend to teach men any thing *new* on these subjects. He only explained and enforced what had long before been taught by Moses and the prophets. But many of these excellent and most important moral precepts had been perverted, and the solid duties of piety, benevolence, and all virtue, had been made to give place to a most debasing and mischievous superstition. The same, indeed, has been the case with the moral precepts of Christianity itself ; so that there will always be great reason to caution men on this head, so
prone

prone are they to the indulgence of their appetites and passions, and so willing to find some substitute for moral virtue, if they can.

Christ did not teach any thing new concerning God, or the maxims of his government, because these things were sufficiently known to the Jews, and explained in their scriptures. The great doctrine of the *divine unity* was well understood, and taken for granted, by all the nation of the Jews. 'That there is *one God*, and there is *no other than he*, and that *to worship him with the heart, is better than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifice*, was a reply of a Jewish scribe to our Saviour, and which met with his perfect approbation.

Least of all had he any occasion to inform them that the Divine Being, the God and Father of all, as well as his own God and Father, was placable to his penitent creatures. This most necessary of all doctrines had been most clearly taught by Moses and all the prophets; so that nothing farther remained to be said on the subject. By Moses the Divine Being solemnly proclaim-

ed himself to be a *God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in mercy, goodness, and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.* All the prophets exhorted to repentance on the same principle. *Return unto me, and I will return unto you,* is the constant burden of their preaching. Indeed, without this all exhortation to repentance would be in vain.

That Christ was himself, by his death and sufferings, the means of reconciling men to God, and of making it to be consistent with his justice to pardon the truly penitent, is a doctrine for which there is no countenance either in the discourses of our Lord, or the writings of the apostles. They all took it for granted, that all that was necessary to be done was to reconcile sinful man to God, not to reconcile God to man. In the fine parable of the prodigal son, Christ informs us that God, our true and affectionate Father, is ready to receive all his offending and penitent children, as it were, with open arms, without any intercession of others, or any atonement whatever. Through the whole of the scriptures

tures God is represented as forgiving sin *freely*, and for *his mercy's*, or *his name's sake only*.

2. To give the greater weight to their instructions, all the prophets of God, with some few exceptions, exemplified them by their own conduct.

But the benefit we derive from the example of good men recorded in the scriptures is only incidental, and is not to be considered as any proper part of the scheme of revelation. Nay the examples of bad men, equally recorded in the scriptures, or in other authentic histories, may sometimes be of as much use to us as that of good men. Since, however, as Christians, we profess to be, and are exhorted to be, in a more especial manner followers of Christ, I shall make a few observations with respect to this subject.

Now the example of Christ, like that of other good men, can only be of partial and occasional use to us. In a great variety of the most trying situations our Lord was never placed, so that in those cases his life cannot furnish any pattern for us. It is his

general temper and character that we are to attend to, and an attention to this may be of great use to us, even in situations in which he himself was never placed. What were most conspicuous in him were the virtues of meekness, humility, heavenly-mindedness, and an intire devotedness to the will of God, in suffering as well as in doing; and with these dispositions we shall in no particular case act wrong.

In obedience to the will of God, and to answer the great designs of his providence, he gave up his innocent life to the malice of his enemies, who put him to death in the most cruel and ignominious manner, in this, as well as in other things, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. *Forasmuch as Christ suffered in the flesh, we must arm ourselves, as Peter says, with the same mind. Because he laid down his life for us, we ought also, as John says, to lay down our lives for the brethren; that is, we ought to serve mankind, at the hazard of every thing dear to us in life, and even of life itself.*

Our Lord's great heroism in suffering
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and dying as he did, will be more admired the more we consider the circumstances of it, especially his extreme sensibility. That a man whose bodily frame was capable of suffering so much as he did under the mere *apprehension* of his approaching death, should, notwithstanding this, die with such noble and calm fortitude, and with such sentiments of piety and benevolence even to his enemies, is indeed wonderful. There is also something peculiarly trying in being the *first* to suffer in any cause. In bearing, however, not only pain, but hardships of various kinds (some of them more trying than any kind of violent death) and bearing them also with a truly Christian spirit, it is for the honour of Christianity, and consequently of Christ, to say that many of the martyrs have not fallen short of the pattern set them.

As to the more common infirmities of human nature, such as the indulgence of sensual appetites and passions, we cannot suppose that the temptation to transgress would be much felt by a person of his exalted character, and great expectations, and

with a violent death in immediate prospect. There is, therefore, nothing very extraordinary, though highly worthy of our imitation, in this part of our Saviour's conduct.

I shall close this head with observing that, in all cases in which the example of *men* cannot be recommended, that of the ever blessed *God* is proposed to us in the scriptures. For we are exhorted to *be perfect as our Father who is in heaven is perfect*. This precept has the advantage of being an unerring rule of conduct. It will prevent our acquiescing in any limited degree of moral excellence; and recourse may be had to it with great advantage in those cases in which the supremacy of the Divine Being, and his infinite knowledge (by which he ever sees the most distant consequences of things, and by which he can bring good out of all evil) does not necessarily make the rule of *his* conduct different from that of *ours*.

3. In order to reform the world, and thereby raise men to a state of future glory and happiness, God has by Jesus Christ, in
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a more especial manner, revealed to them the knowledge of a future state of rewards and punishments, as supplying the most effectual motive to the practice of virtue. This is, indeed, the distinguishing excellence of the gospel. By this gospel *life and immortality are fully brought to light*, as it affords a more satisfactory evidence of a resurrection to a future and immortal life than had been given to the world before, so as to establish the belief of this most important of all truths to the end of time. This great end Christ effected, not only by preaching the doctrine with authority from God, evidenced by miracles, even such as raising the dead to life, but by being himself an example of what he announced to others; having submitted to die in the most public and indisputable manner, and having been raised to life, to the complete satisfaction of a sufficient number of the most competent witnesses.

Had mankind, in a body, been asked what evidence they required for a doctrine so important and interesting to them, they could not have demanded more than was

actually given them, viz. that the great preacher of the doctrine should, in his own person, afford them an example of its truth, by dying and rising again within a limited time.

This was no new doctrine to the Jews. The great body of that nation were then, and are to this day, fully persuaded of it. This must, in my opinion, have arisen from some very early revelation from God on the subject, but probably prior to the writing of the books of Moses; whatever difficulty we may now find in accounting for the remarkable silence concerning a doctrine of so much importance in his writings, as well as those of the Old Testament in general. Had this great revelation been made to Moses himself, or to any of the subsequent prophets, we could not but have heard of it. But having been made known probably to our first parents, and, though it was lost in other nations, having been always retained by the Jews, there was the less occasion for any mention of it in books designed for their peculiar use. But what was well known to the Jews would be *good tidings of great*

great joy to the Gentile world, which was ignorant of it.

When *the fulness of time was come*, that God thought proper to manifest his paternal regards to all his offspring of mankind, it was highly proper that, as the original record of this great doctrine of a resurrection was then lost, it should be renewed; that so no reasonable doubt might remain concerning it; and this was completely effected by the resurrection of Christ, who likewise brought it into view in all his discourses. For he did not, like Moses, give his disciples any expectation of happiness in this life, but only at the resurrection of the just; and to this *great hope that was set before them*, he taught them cheerfully to sacrifice all their interests here, and even life itself; assuring them that they who should lose their lives for the sake of the gospel, would receive them again, with infinite advantage, in the world to come. It was his express declaration, that his kingdom was not of this world, and he enjoined all his followers to *lay up their treasure in heaven*. We also learn from the apostle Paul that we

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are to walk by faith and not by sight, since the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

When God had by this means imparted to mankind this most important information concerning himself and his moral government, concerning their duty here, and their expectations hereafter, nothing more was requisite in order completely to effect his great design, the reformation of the world, and the preparation of men for that future happy state which is announced to us in the gospel. For with these helps, the rational nature that God had originally given to man was sufficient, without any supernatural operation upon their minds, to their restoration to his favour and their future happiness. The historical evidence that we now have of the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ, is of itself sufficient to produce *Christian faith*, or a firm belief of the great facts on which Christianity rests; and this faith, or belief, is sufficient to induce men to reform their conduct, and to fit them, by a life of virtue here, for a state of happiness hereafter.

Accordingly, no farther help than this is ever promised to us in the gospel. Like good seed, in our Saviour's most instructive parable, it is scattered promiscuously on all kinds of soil ; but nothing is done to the soil itself, and therefore it brings forth much fruit, or none at all, just as the minds of men were previously disposed to receive it. The *gift of the spirit*, of which we read, always means some *miraculous power*, calculated for the confirmation of the gospel in the early ages only. We are taught, indeed, to pray to God to be led into, and to be kept in, the ways of truth and virtue. But we are also taught to pray for our daily bread ; and as our daily bread is not given to us without our own labour, so likewise good dispositions of mind are only to be acquired by the use of proper means ; though both the means, and the power of using them, being from God, it is right to ascribe all to him, to pray to him for every blessing, temporal or spiritual, and to thank him for all of them alike.

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As a practical improvement of this doctrine, I shall observe (1.) that from it we may infer the dignity of human nature; man being a creature the most distinguished by his great Creator among his works here below, in that we are the proper subjects of his moral government, and fit heirs of immortality. This implies that we are capable of unlimited improvement; and what we see of man in this life makes this probable. We see no bounds to increasing knowledge and ripening virtue, though we, and all created beings, shall ever fall infinitely short of the perfection of the supreme Being, who is, and ever will be, alone, the *absolutely good*.

Let us then, my brethren, with all humility and gratitude to God, for every thing that we have, or are, respect ourselves, as so greatly distinguished by the Author of all excellence, and not carelessly and wickedly abandon the glorious prospects that are set before us. For a beggar in our streets to reject the offer of a kingdom, would not be more preposterous. We can
hardly

hardly form an idea of greater depravity of mind than for a man seriously to prefer utter annihilation to that immortality which is brought to light by the gospel, and to maintain that the great and extensive views it opens to us do not tend to enlarge and exalt the mind, and qualify men to act with more dignity, generosity, and integrity, as well as true piety, in this life, in consequence of being taught that the connexions and habits which we form here below, will be continued beyond the grave, where we shall again find ourselves under the government of the same God, and be again happy in our subjection to him, and in our renewed intercourse with each other, to all eternity. To maintain, as some have done, that this Christian doctrine of a future state has any hurtful tendency, appears to me to argue such depravity of mind, as can only be produced by gross vices, such as make men secretly wish that it may not be true. Thousands have found that the firm belief of it tends to make men *purify themselves even as God is pure.*

2. Let us learn from this doctrine to
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cherish

cherish a sense of the great blessings of Christianity, as the only means of giving men this glorious prospect, and preparing them for future happiness. For that any of the human race will survive the grave nature gives us no reason to expect.

Christians would have a much higher sense of the value of the gospel, if they had not forgotten what heathenism was. That such vices as the heathens were addicted to, some of them too abominable and horrid to be mentioned in such a place as this, should have been encouraged by any thing that ever bore the name of *religion*, and even should have been practised as *religious rites*, which recommend men to the object of their worship, would not now be credible, did not the most authentic history remain as an indisputable evidence of the facts. Let us then bless God for the gospel, which brings us from darkness to light, from vice to virtue, from death to immortality; and let us do every thing in our power to extend the knowledge and the blessings of it to all the human race. More especially, as a means to the great end, let
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us exert ourselves to purify it from those corruptions which both defeat the great design of it, and prevent its reception among Jews, Mahometans, and heathens. This fatal tendency has every thing that, in any degree, renders it less amiable, or less credible ; and nothing does this more than any infringement of the great doctrine of the *unity of God*, and the equity of his government.

3. All that I have represented having been done for us, the best instructions having been given us for a virtuous life, exemplified by the lives of holy men, of prophets, and of Jesus Christ ; having had the most satisfactory evidence given us of a future state of retribution after death, nothing more could have been done to induce men to abandon a course of vice, and to live in such a manner as to secure a happy immortality. If the nature of *virtue*, and of *man*, be considered, it will be evident that nothing more could have been done for us. The *will* cannot be forced. It can only be determined by proper motives. God requires that we should give him our *hearts*,
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which can only be engaged by the force of persuasion.

As far, therefore, as it became the Divine Being to interpose, nothing has been left untried to reform the world. If then, notwithstanding all these measures for our good, we continue disobedient, and addicted to vice, may not the Divine Being with the greatest propriety speak of us as of the children of Israel of old? “What could I have done to my vineyard more than I have done; nevertheless, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes.”

We cannot think that, after all this that has been done for us, we are at liberty to neglect and slight it, and that God will take no notice of our disobedience and perverseness. No, our sins under the dispensation of the gospel are attended with every aggravation that can heighten their guilt, and increase our condemnation. As the apostle says, *which way can we come off, or escape, if we neglect so great salvation.* Let it not be our condemnation, that *light is come into the world, but that we loved darkness*

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ness rather than light, because our deeds were evil.

We who profess what we wish to be considered as *rational Christianity*, have least of all any just excuse for a deficiency in that temper, and a want of those good works, which our religion requires. We, depending upon the free mercy of God to the penitent, reject the idea of being saved by any righteousness that is not our own. We believe that no man can obey the laws of God for another, or suffer the punishment due to the crimes of another ; and we disclaim the belief of any thing whatever standing in the place of moral virtue. We believe the gospel both to contain a sufficient rule of life, and also sufficient motives to the observance of it.

As therefore, my brethren, we not only *name the name of Christ*, and profess ourselves to be his disciples, but think that we profess it in greater purity than many others, let us give proof of it by departing farther from all iniquity, and by being *a peculiar people zealous of good works*. If this be not our resolution, and steady uniform

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conduct,

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conduct, there is not a nation under heaven that will not rise up against us, and condemn us, at the last day. For no people ever enjoyed greater advantages than we do. If they neglect their advantages, which are inferior to ours, their condemnation will be proportionably less. But if they improve them, while we neglect ours, double will be their recompence, and double will be our condemnation. May we all seriously consider these things, *the things that relate to our everlasting peace and welfare, before they be for ever hid from our eyes.*

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

No. I.

The Preface to the Discourse on the Resurrection of Jesus.

THE following discourse was composed while I was at Buxton, in the course of the last summer, in consequence of being requested to preach to the company in the assembly-room, after the usual morning prayers of the church of England. Having no sermon with me that I thought so proper as I could wish for so mixed an audience, I composed *this*, which I thought would offend no christian, but tend to confirm the faith of all; and which I also hoped might make a favourable impression on unbelievers, some of whom it was probable would be my hearers. Both these objects I have reason to think were, in some measure, gained; and in compliance with the request of some who were my hearers at that time, and of many others who have heard the discourse, much enlarged and improved, since, I now publish it.

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Let any man who is an object of dislike, as I am to the clergy of the church of England, conduct himself with ever so much prudence and caution, I do not think it is possible for him to avoid giving offence. On this occasion, however, I flattered myself that I had succeeded; but I have since found that I did not. A person, who I believe may be stiled a dignitary of the church of England, has been very free with his virulent invectives against me on this most innocent business; asserting, on the authority, he says, of those who were present, and who, it is supposed, were also clergymen, that I, in a manner, forced myself upon the audience, by *requesting* to preach to them, which he calls ‘a most indecent intrusion *,’ and that I took the opportunity of ‘insulting the faith and the service of those who attended it,’ that by ‘desiring to have the litany omitted on that occasion, I shewed the most pointed disapprobation of the service, and took upon myself to rule and direct the service of the church of England;’ that my discourse ‘gave great offence to several persons of respectable understanding, who uniformly represented it as calculated to weaken the evidence of our Lord’s resurrection as a divine and miraculous

* The passages marked with inverted commas, are from the clergyman’s own letter, which was written with deliberation, on purpose to be shewn to me.

‘fact,

‘ fact, wrought in conformity to the antient prophesies;’ that ‘ it was scarcely attended to with patience,’ and that ‘ in opposition to the solemn service which the congregation had just before offered to the trinity, and in contradiction to those rules of the church, which forbid the maintaining of opposite doctrines by different preachers, I closed the whole with an unitarian prayer.’ On the whole, he adds ‘ I easily perceive where this would end, if the Doctor’s power was equal to the disposition he has manifested towards the church of England. There would be as little toleration of those who should use the liturgy, as there was in the days of Cromwell.’

All this, and much more, having, as I have been informed, been said on the occasion, it may not be amiss to give the following short account of the matter; and hundreds who were present can witness the truth, or falsehood, of the greatest part of it.

Having, at the unexpected request of the company at the inn where I lodged, read a sermon to them on a Sunday evening; on the Tuesday following, General Stratton, and Mr. Sligo, a gentleman of fortune in Scotland, came to me, deputed, as they said, by the company at the Grand Hotel, and the other houses near the Baths, to

request that I would give them a sermon on the Sunday following. I replied that, if it was the wish of the company, I would readily comply with it; and returning my compliments to them, desired them to name the time and place. Some time after this they came to me again, and said that the company having considered of it, were of opinion that the most convenient place would be the assembly-room; and that the time that would best suit them all would be after their usual morning service, which however, with great liberality, they said they did not desire me to attend, as I might not approve of it; and that in this case I might be in the adjoining card-room till it was over,

Now, though I certainly do object, and very seriously, to do any thing that should be construed into a joining in trinitarian worship, or offering to any creature, how distinguished soever, that homage to which I consider the one true God, the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, to be alone entitled, I make no scruple of attending the worship of any human beings occasionally, as a stranger and spectator; and I had no intention of absenting myself on the present occasion, till I found I could not prevail on the clergyman who read the prayers to shorten the service, which, on
account

account of the length of my discourse, I wished him to do.

Not succeeding in this, I took an opportunity some time after the prayers were begun, of retiring into the card-room, for the sake of looking over my discourse, and striking out such parts of it as could best be omitted. When this was done, I returned to the prayers before they were quite finished. Still, however, my discourse was considerably longer than usual: but I was heard with the greatest attention, nor did I perceive any marks of disapprobation from any of the company. I concluded the service with a short prayer, addressed, as most of the prayers in the liturgy of the church of England are, to the Father only; so that if this was a contradiction to the trinitarian forms in the same liturgy, some of the prayers in this book are contradictory to the rest.

After the service, I was thanked not only by General Stratton and Mr. Sligo in the name, as they said, of the company, but by many of the most respectable persons present, some of whom avowed religious sentiments with respect to the trinity very different from mine; and in consequence of a previous invitation by the Provost of the university of Dublin, I dined at the Grand Hotel, where some of the particulars of my ser-

mon, being new to part of the company, were the subject of conversation, and every thing that I heard was much in favour of it. Several clergymen were present at my discourse, and one of them, I was told, expressed much approbation of it. Others, it appears, were much offended at my being asked to preach on this occasion, and one of them, I was told, made an attempt, but without success, to express his disapprobation, in a discourse composed on purpose for the Sunday following. This, however, I did not know at the time, for the next morning I proceeded on my journey, and left the place.

Much of the offence that I gave on this occasion was by 'taking upon me' (as this dignitary says) 'to perform a part of the ministry of the church of England, in a place of that description.' Now, not to observe, that the place in which I preached was not consecrated, and that the appropriation of the building to the offices of any particular mode of religion was not a thing to be considered by *me*, but by those who applied to me to officiate in it, I see no reason why christians of the most opposite sentiments may not meet to worship together, and edify one another, on principles that are common to them all, avoiding the introduction of any that would give offence. If I had an opportunity (which I would by no means decline)

decline) of preaching before a society of high calvinists, or the most rigid catholics, I would do it in such a manner as not to offend any of them, and yet I should have a sufficient choice of topics on which to discourse. For the most important articles, not only of christian practice, but also of christian faith, are those in which all who ever called themselves christians are, and always were, agreed; nor should I have any scruple to desire any christian minister, of whatever denomination, to preach for me, if I knew him to be a man of sense and discretion, who would observe the same rule of prudence in my pulpit, that I should make a point of doing in his.

I am not sorry to have this opportunity of saying that I and my congregation gave this proof of our liberality in this respect the very last year, by inviting Mr. Berington, a catholic priest in the neighbourhood of Birmingham, to preach our annual Sunday-school sermon. All the subscribers to that charity were convened on the occasion, after it had been the subject of much conversation several weeks before; and on my proposing it, it was cheerfully and unanimously acceded to; and one of the company very pleasantly and properly said that, as the devotional part of the service on that occasion would fall to me, he hoped that on that day I would omit praying for the downfal of antichrist;

antichrist; which I very readily engaged to do. The invitation was accordingly sent, and as the reader will see, by a copy of the letters which he will find subjoined to this Preface, was very properly received, though it was not complied with, for prudential considerations, which I hope will not exist long.

I should have been ashamed of any congregation to which I officiate, had they made any difficulty of acting so liberal a part. We did not desire Mr. Berington to celebrate mass, or to do any thing else in which we could not concur with him; nor, I am confident, would he obtrude upon his audience any sentiments that he knew would be displeasing to them; and then what objection could there be to his principles as a catholic, when they did not appear? A Jew, or a Mahometan, might recommend charity, and what christian could object to hear him do it, if he did it well? From officiating in our places of public worship no men of sense, and of good moral characters, are excluded by any forms of consecration. We are ready to accept of the services of any person by whose discourses we can hope to be edified. Would all christians act upon this generous principle, and be ready to meet on every piece of ground that was common to them, true catholicism would be greatly promoted, prejudices would

would much sooner die away, and truth, which we are all equally interested in discovering, would have a much better opportunity of prevailing over error than it now has.

To the Rev. Mr. Berington.

DEAR SIR,

It is with peculiar satisfaction that I communicate to you the very hearty and unanimous request of the subscribers to our Sunday school, to give us a sermon at the New Meeting, on any Sunday that shall be most convenient to yourself, within about a month from this time, when a collection will be made for the purpose, in aid of our subscription. We have all been charmed with your excellent and liberal tract on the subject, and we wish to show the world that, different as our persuasions are, we can meet together on the common principles of christianity and benevolence.

With very great respect, I am,

Dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY,

*Birmingham,
Oct. 28, 1799.*

Mr.

Mr. Berington's Answer.

DEAR SIR,

The request of the subscribers to your Sunday school, which you have communicated to me, has given me great pleasure, though it has excited my surprise. It seems to indicate the dawn of better days, when difference in speculative belief shall no longer divide the hearts of christians. The novelty only of the proposal surprised me. Nor can I sufficiently admire the liberality of sentiment manifested by the subscribers on the occasion, a liberality which at all times I should be most happy to imitate, and to enforce. But I cannot comply with their request. It would give offence, I fear, to the society of which I am a member (so unprecedented is the measure) and willingly I would not shock even the prejudices of others, unless by that shock I might reasonably hope to surmount them. The temper of the times likewise must be weighed, lest by precipitance we rather check, than encourage, that happy tendency to benevolent and generous sentiments which rapidly advances among those of my persuasion, and which you, and other friends to the best interests of men, are effectually labouring to establish in a wider sphere.

I beg,

I beg, Sir, you will convey my apology to the subscribers in the most grateful terms. They may know that I truly value the opinion they entertain of me, and that though, from prudential motives, I cannot comply with the letter of their request, it shall be my endeavour to serve the great cause they patronize by every means in my power. We differ, it is true, in points to which men, I think, have given an undue weight; but the common principles of Christianity and benevolence, as you express it, must ever remain, I trust, equally dear to us all.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours most sincerely,

Oscot,
Oct. 20, 1790.

J. BERINGTON.

THE subscribers to the Sunday-school being convened to receive this answer, we could only lament that any reasons of prudence should be an obstacle to Mr. Berington's compliance with our request, and even defer our exhibiting to the world an example of that liberality in which Christians are so much deficient, and which we wished to take this opportunity of recommending.

No. II.

An Address to the Jews, prefixed to the
same Discourse.*

Worshippers of the One True God,

UNDER this noble appellation, unhappily not as yet applicable to the great body of Christians, it is with peculiar satisfaction that I address you; having in this respect the honour to rank with you. But do not be offended that the generality of Christians should have been drawn aside into idolatry, worshipping a creature instead of the creator, when your own ancestors, notwithstanding the manifest tokens of divine power accompanying them, and though he stood in a peculiar relation to them, and shewed them distinguished favour, were for many ages drawn aside in a similar manner, worshipping the sun, the moon, and the host of heaven, instead of the great Being who made them. Time and disci-

* An amicable conference with some Jews who heard this discourse was the occasion of this address to them. A freer intercourse with Jews and Christians would have a good effect on both.

pline brought you to a just sense of your duty, and things are evidently taking the same course with Christians.

The time is happily come, when the eyes of great numbers are opened to see their errors; and being enlightened themselves, they are zealous to give their light to their brethren.

We are now well satisfied that Jesus Christ, though a true prophet of God, is no more an object of divine worship than Moses, or any other prophet. He was himself, as one of your nation, a humble worshipper of the God of your fathers, and he instructed his followers to worship no other than him. These Christians are called *unitarians*, in opposition to the *trinitarians*, who pay divine honours to two other persons besides *the one God and Father of all*; and you cannot have been so inattentive to the present state of things among Christians, as not to perceive that the unitarian doctrine is very rapidly gaining ground. The belief of the *divine unity*, and also that of the proper *humanity of Christ*, are not now the private opinions of a few persons only, which some time ago they were almost afraid to avow, but they are publicly professed by great numbers, the most respectable for their ability, their learning, and their piety, among Christians. They are also not confined to one nation, but
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are to be found in almost every part of the Christian world. Nor are you to judge of the number of unitarians from those who openly profess themselves to be so. They now abound in all churches professedly trinitarian, though, from timidity, or some other motive, which I do not undertake to defend, they do not make a public avowal of their sentiments. By this means, however, things are ripening apace for a general declaration in favour of unitarianism whenever circumstances shall be favourable to it.

I was much surprised, but far from being displeased, at one instance of your extreme scrupulosity on this subject. Many of you, when you heard me deliver the following discourse in Essex Chapel, were, I find, much offended at my calling Christ *Lord*, thinking it to be an appellation too nearly approaching to those which in the scriptures are appropriated to God. We cannot well be too cautious how we ascribe to any creature, though the most distinguished prophet, those titles which are more usually given to the supreme Being. But be assured that I had no such meaning, or intention; nor would any Englishman so understand me. By the term *Lord* we simply mean *master*, which all Christians acknowledge Christ to be, since God has appointed him to be our teacher and instructor, and we
therefore

therefore call ourselves by his name. Be assured also that I would never make use of the term again, if I thought that, after reflecting on the subject, it would give you the least offence.

Agreeing with you in this fundamental principle of all religion, particularly intrusted, as it were, to the guardianship of your nation, when you were set apart from the rest of the world, you will naturally look upon us with less aversion than you have hitherto justly done Christians in general; and I hope you will be induced to give a more patient and candid attention to what we have to propose in favour of the divine mission of Christ, and compare our arguments with those which you are able to produce in proof of the divine mission of Moses, and that of your other prophets.

I have already addressed you twice at large upon this important subject; and writing, as you are satisfied, from a principle of the purest goodwill to your nation, I am happy to find, that my *Letters* have not displeased you. Happy indeed, should I think myself to be, in any measure, the instrument in the hand of Divine Providence of opening the eyes of any of you to your true interest, and thereby of restoring you to the favour of God, and to that future glorious state

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which

which is destined for you. This great event, however, God will bring about in his own time, in his own way, and by whatever instruments he pleases. And I hope the time is approaching, when, as the prophet Zechariah (chap. xii. 10.) has foretold, "he will pour upon you the spirit
" of grace and of supplication, and when you
" shall look upon him whom you have pierced,
" and shall mourn for him as for an only son," as sensible of the wickedness of your ancestors in rejecting and crucifying Jesus, avowing yourselves his disciples.

Having before requested your attention to the evidences of Christianity in general, let me now solicit it to that of the resurrection of Jesus in particular, as the most important fact in the gospel history. Examine the evidence which I here lay before you, as you would that of any other historical facts, such as those which prove the divine mission of Moses, and consider whether it be not equally clear and satisfactory. And if Jesus, after declaring that he came from God, and after resting the proof of his divine mission, in a more especial manner, on his own resurrection from the dead, did actually rise from the dead, to the complete satisfaction of a sufficient number of the most competent witnesses, you must acknowledge that he was no impostor, and
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that whatever he declared as from God may be depended upon, as much as that which Moses delivered in his name.

Do not content yourselves, as I perceive you are apt to do, with an admiration of your laws, as delivered down to you from your forefathers, and with your obligation, as their descendants, to observe them; but carefully review the *history* of your ancestors, and of your laws, and consider the *reasons* they had to believe that they came from God. Your sacred books tell you, and I doubt not they tell you truly, that your fathers themselves, besides seeing the miracles of Moses, passed through the Red sea, which was divided in a miraculous manner for them, and then heard the ten commandments delivered in an audible voice from Mount Sinai. But do you consider the *authority* of those books, and the reasons why you receive them as authentic histories of past events, and then compare this evidence with that which Christians allege for the authority of the books of the New Testament. And if the facts there recorded be true, if Jesus was declared to be the son of God by an audible voice from heaven; if, like Moses, he wrought real miracles, or did such things as no man could have done if God had not been with him; if after being put to death in the most public man-

ner, God raised him from the dead, and, in the sight of numbers of his followers, took him up into heaven, his divine mission can no more be questioned than that of Moses.

Believing this, you ought to declare yourselves Christians, though without ceasing to be Jews, or discontinuing any of the observances of your own law, which Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil, and to confirm; having solemnly declared (Mat. v. 18.) that "till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

If Jesus was a true prophet, he must likewise be *the Messiah*, whom Daniel expressly says was to be *cut off*, though under a prince of the house of David, (whom, if you please, you may call another *Messiah*, or a person *anointed* of God for a great purpose respecting your nation) you will be restored to your own country, and become the most distinguished people upon earth.

What then can be your great objection to receiving one more prophet of your own nation than you have hitherto done, and consequently complying with all his injunctions, one of which is to be baptized, in token of your new profession, and another to celebrate the Lord's supper, as you do the passover.

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Do not wonder that God should require thus much of you by Christ, when he required so much more by Moses, though he made no such addition to your observances by any of the intermediate prophets. Christ was the most distinguished prophet that your nation ever produced; as by him God revealed to mankind in a more satisfactory manner than, as far as appears, he had ever done before, the great doctrine of a resurrection to a future immortal life: and as by his means the Gentile world was brought to the knowledge and worship of the God of your fathers, so as to make a new dispensation, and a most distinguished æra in the religious history of the world. This great object you see is in a great measure effected, and it would have been completely so long ago, if the corruptions of Christianity, and especially the introduction of the idolatrous worship of Jesus Christ, and other human beings, had not put a stop to it. But when this great abomination shall be removed, as there can be no doubt that it soon will be, Christianity will resume its pristine vigour, and enlighten and bless the whole world; when you will be no longer able to charge Christians with *idolatry*, but, as your prophets say, when *God will be one, and his name one.*

I am happy to find that you think it a considerable advantage to you that so great a part of the world is Christian, rather than Heathen, and that you live among people who respect your scriptures as much as you do yourselves. This advantage you would not have had among the Mahometans, who, though they allow the inspiration of your prophets, as well as that of Jesus Christ, think that all former revelations were superseded by their prophet Mahomet; so that they make no use of your scriptures, or ours, but treat these sacred books with great contempt. In time, I doubt not, you will find yourselves still more indebted to Christians than you have hitherto been, and that the unspeakable obligations we are under to you will be repaid by our services, in your conversion to Christianity. We owe you much indeed, but we live in the hope of discharging the debt. In the mean time we must content ourselves with shewing our gratitude and good-will; reflecting on the important articles in which we agree with you, and which we derived from you.

The great object of our worship, and all the great articles of our faith, will then be the same. We agree in the belief of one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that this God is gracious and merciful to all the truly penitent,

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as no doubt he will be to you, when you shall turn to him with your whole hearts. “ Believe
“ in the Lord your God, so shall you be estab-
“ lished, believe his prophets, so shall you prof-
“ per.” 2 Chron. xx. 20. Moses, speaking of
your present calamitous state, dispersed among all
the nations of the world, says, Deut. iv. 29,
“ But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord
“ thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek
“ him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,
“ When thou art in tribulation, and all these
“ things” (viz. the curses he had mentioned)
“ are come upon thee, even in the latter days,
“ if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and be obe-
“ dient to his voice (for the Lord thy God is a
“ merciful God) he will not forsake thee, neither
“ destroy thee, neither forget the covenant of thy
“ fathers, which he sware unto thee.”

This God of your fathers seems now to be
preparing the way, in the course of his unsearch-
able providence, for your restoration to his fa-
vour, and to your own country. Let nothing be
wanting on your part to render yourselves the
proper objects of such great favour. Of all na-
tions you alone have been distinguished by a par-
ticular providence, so that your outward prospe-
rity has ever kept pace with your faith and obe-

dience ; and this I doubt not will be the case to the end of time.

All your persecutions have arisen from *trinitarian*, i. e. *idolatrous* Christians, but all *unitarians* will naturally love and respect you, acknowledging their unspeakable obligations to you, as the ancient depositories of the great article of their faith. As one of them, and second to none in love and respect for you, I entreat your attention to this discourse ; and with my earnest prayers for your happiness, temporal and eternal, I subscribe myself, as before,

Your brother in the sole worship of
the one living and true God,

Birmingham,
May 20, 1791.

J. PRIESTLEY.

No. III.

*The Preface to the Discourse containing a
View of Revealed Religion.*

THOUGH publications of the nature of *this* have seldom any extensive circulation, yet as some persons into whose hands it may fall, may want information

formation concerning the idea of *ordination* that prevails among Dissenters, I shall observe that we (at least many of us) do not now mean by it the *giving of orders*, without which a person could not be considered as properly qualified to exercise the office of minister in a Christian society. As all our societies are independent of each other, the members of each of them are, of course, the sole judges of the qualifications of the person whom they chuse to be their minister. Consequently their appointment is his proper *orders*, or *title to officiate* among them; and all that is done by the ministers who bear any part in what is usually called *the ordination service* (besides thereby virtually expressing their approbation of the choice of the congregation, and giving their minister the right hand of fellowship) is to recommend him and his labours to the divine blessing by prayer, and to give him and the people proper advice.

On this idea it is now customary with many Dissenters, especially those who are called Presbyterians, for the minister to discharge all the functions of his office, baptizing and administering the Lord's supper, as well as preaching and praying, before ordination, in order more effectually to remove the prejudices which still remain with many, founded on the idea that some powers are conferred on this occasion, powers which qualify him

him to do *after* this ceremony what he could not do *before*.

The proper *ordination service*, therefore, consists in the *prayer over the candidate*, and the *charge*. But the congregation, and also many strangers, being usually assembled on the occasion, and especially a number of ministers being present, it has been usual for one of them to deliver a discourse, or *sermon*, on some subject relating to Christianity in general, or the ministry of it in particular; and instead of the particular *confession of faith*, which was formerly required of all candidates for the ministry (his soundness in which was then deemed essential) certain *questions* are put to him, which lead him to give as much as he thinks proper of his views of Christianity and the ministry of it, and the motives and maxims of his own conduct, for the instruction of the audience.

The ceremony of *imposition of hands*, which in primitive times accompanied the action of praying for a particular person, by which the apostles communicated spiritual gifts, and which was afterwards supposed to be necessary to the conferring of proper qualifications for the gospel ministry, is now generally laid aside by us, since we are conscious that we have nothing to impart, and wish not to encourage superstition.

Ordination

Ordination being now no longer considered in the light of *conferring orders*, as in Episcopal, and the proper Presbyterian churches, many of the more liberal Dissenters neglect it altogether; thinking it to encourage superstition, and to keep up a mere *form* when the *substance* is wanting. But when the design of ordination, as above explained, is well understood, when the person ordained shall have performed every part of the ministerial duty before, as well as after, his ordination, though the name given to the service no longer suggests the idea that was formerly annexed to it, no superstition is encouraged. And since the connexion between a minister and his congregation, and especially the first that he forms, is a very serious concern, there cannot, surely, be any impropriety, but on the contrary the greatest propriety, in making it an occasion of solemn prayer; and then exhortation or admonition, from a minister of greater age and experience, to one who has but lately entered upon the office, is particularly seasonable. I cannot help, therefore, expressing my wish, that some service, to which the name of *ordination* may well enough be given, may be kept up among us, at the same time that every precaution is taken to prevent superstition with respect to it.

Birmingham.
Nov. 1, 1790.

J. PRIESTLEY.

No.

No. IV.

The Correspondence with Mr. Gibbon.

Dr. Priestley's Card to Mr. Gibbon.

DR. PRIESTLEY presents his compliments to Mr. Gibbon, begs his acceptance of a copy of his *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, and requests his particular attention to the *General Conclusion*, Part I.

Birmingham,
Dec. 11, 1782.

Mr. Gibbon's First Letter.

SIR,

As a mark of your *esteem*, I should have accepted with pleasure your *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. You have been careful to inform me that it is intended not as a gift, but as a *challenge*; and such a challenge you must permit me to decline. At the same time, since you glory in outstripping the zeal of the Mufti and the Lama, it may be proper for me to declare, that I should equally refuse the defiance of those venerable Divines. Once, and once only, the just
defence

defence of my own veracity provoked me to descend into the amphitheatre; but as long as you attack opinions which I have never maintained, and maintain principles which I have never denied, you may safely exult in my silence, and your own victory. The difference between us (on the credibility of miracles) which you chuse to suppose, and wish to argue, is a trite and antient topic of controversy; and from the opinion which you entertain of yourself, and of me, it does not appear probable, that our dispute would either edify, or enlighten the public.

That public will decide to whom the invidious name of *unbeliever* more justly belongs: to the historian, who, without interposing his own sentiments, has delivered a simple narrative of authentic facts, or to the disputant, who proudly rejects all natural proof of the immortality of the soul, overthrows (by circumscribing) the inspiration of the Evangelists and Apostles, and condemns the religion of every Christian nation as a fable less innocent, but no less absurd, than Mahomet's journey to the third Heavens.

And now, Sir, since you assume a right to determine the objects of my past and future studies, give me leave to convey to your ear the almost unanimous, and not offensive, wish of the philosophic world: that you would confine your talents

414 *Correspondence with Mr. Gibbon.*

lents and industry to those sciences in which real and useful improvements *can* be made. Remember the end of your predecessor Servetus, not of his life (the Calvins of our days are restrained from the use of the same fiery arguments) but I mean the end of his reputation. His theological writings are lost in oblivion; and if his book on the trinity be still preserved, it is only because it contains the first rudiments of the discovery of the circulation of the blood.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient humble Servant,

E. GIBBON.

The Answer.

SIR,

It would have been impertinent in me, especially considering the object of my History, to have sent you a copy of it as a mark of my *esteem*, or friendship. What I meant was to act the part of a fair and open adversary; and I am truly sorry that you decline the discussion I proposed. For though you are of a different opinion, I do not think that either of us could be better employed; and should the Mufti and the Lama (whose challenge you say you would also decline) become parties in the business, I should rejoice the more.

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I do not well know what you can mean by intimating that I am "a greater unbeliever than yourself; that I attack opinions which you never maintained, and maintain principles which you never denied." If you mean to assert that you are a believer in Christianity, and meant to recommend it, I must say that your mode of writing has been very ill adapted to gain your purpose. If there be any certain method of discovering a man's real object, yours has been to discredit Christianity in fact, while, in words you represent yourself as a friend to it; a conduct which I scruple not to call highly unworthy and mean; an insult on the common sense of the Christian world. As a method of screening you from the notice of the law (which is as hostile to me as it is to you) you must know that it could avail you nothing; and though that mode of writing might be deemed ingenious and witty, in the first inventor of it, it has been too often repeated to deserve that appellation now.

According to your own rule of conduct, *this* charge ought to provoke you to descend into the amphitheatre once more, as much as the accusation of Mr. Davis. For it is a call upon you to defend not your *principles* only, but also your *honour*. For what can reflect greater dishonour upon a man, than to say one thing and mean

important truth, than I should have done if, besides the certain discovery of the circulation of the blood, he had made any other, the most celebrated discovery in philosophy.

However, I do not see what my philosophical friends (of whom I have many, and whom I think I value as I ought) have to do with my metaphysical or theological writings. They may, if they please, consider them as my particular whims or amusement, and accordingly neglect them. They have, in fact, interfered very little with my application to philosophy, since I have had the means of doing it. I was never more busy, or more successfully so, in my philosophical pursuits, than during the time that I have been employed about the *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. I am at this very time *totus in illis*, as my friends know, and as the public will know in due time, which with me is never long; and if you had thought proper to enter into the discussion I proposed, it would not have made me neglect my laboratory, or omit a single experiment that I should otherwise have made.

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Mr. Gibbon's Second Letter.

SIR,

As I do not presume to judge of the sentiments and intentions of another, I shall not enquire how

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far you are disposed to suffer, or to inflict, martyrdom. It only becomes me to say, that the style and temper of your last letter has satisfied me of the propriety of declining all farther correspondence, whether public or private, with such an adversary.

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

E. GIBBON.

The Answer.

SIR,

I neither requested, nor wished, to have any private correspondence with you. All that my MS. card required was a simple acknowledgment of the receipt of the copy of my work. You chose, however, to give me a specimen of your temper and feelings, and also what I thought to be an opening to a farther call upon you for a justification of yourself in public. Of this I was willing to take advantage, and at the same time to satisfy you that my philosophical pursuits, for which, whether in earnest or not, you were pleased to express some concern, would not be interrupted in consequence of it. As this correspondence, from the origin and nature of it, cannot be deemed confidential, I may (especially if I resume my observations on your conduct as an historian) give the public an opportunity of judging of the propriety of my
answer

answer to your first extraordinary letter, and also to this last truly enigmatical one; to interpret which requires much more sagacity, than to discover your real intentions with respect to Christianity, though you might think you had carefully concealed them from all human inspection.

Wishing to hear from you just as little as you please in private, and just as much as you please in public,

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Mr. Gibbon's Third Letter.

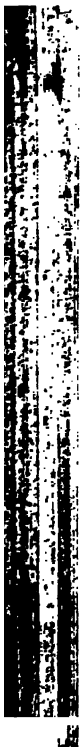
If Dr. Priestley consults his friends, he will probably learn, that a single copy of a paper, addressed under a seal, to a single person, and not relative to any public or official business, must always be considered as *private correspondence*, which a man of honour is not at liberty to print, without the consent of the writer. That consent, in the present instance, Mr. Gibbon thinks proper to withhold: and as he desires to escape all farther altercation, he shall not trouble Dr. Priestley, or himself, with explaining the motives of his refusal.

The Answer.

Dr. Priestley is as unwilling to be guilty of any real *impropriety* as Mr. Gibbon can wish him













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